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The Fierce Tribe

Mickey Weems

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Masculine Identity and Performance in the Circuit

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Bill Haberkam and Just Circuit, www.justcircuit.com

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To Kevin Mason, my beloved

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Young couple at White Party-Palm Springs 2008.

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Laroyé—Kabiesile—Atôtô—Aie Yeou—Ogun Ye—Eparrei Oya—Oké Aro—Epa Baba—Odo Ya.

Preface

There are also cases of people coming together and creating festivity out of nothing, or at least without the excuse of a commercial concert or athletic event…. Gay male culture features "circuit parties," involving dancing and sometimes costuming, and with the help from chemical stimulants, these can go on for days.

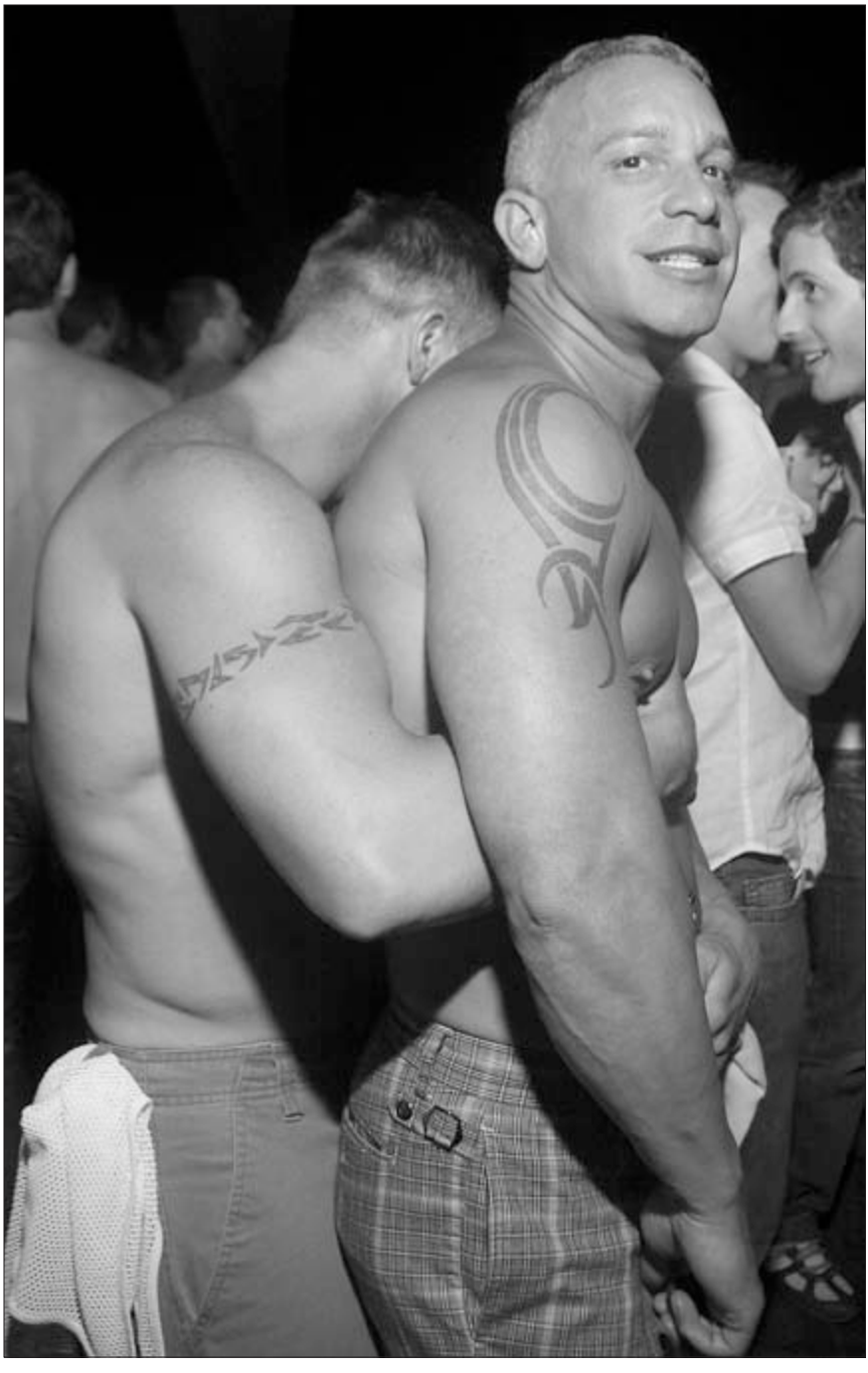
—Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets* (258)

Public attitudes toward Gay men in the United States and Canada have improved immensely in the last few years. Some books in recent popular literature highlight the positive impact Gay men have made on society. *How the Homosexuals Saved Civilization* by Cathy Crimmins (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2004) and *The Soul Beneath the Skin* by David Nimmons (published in 2002) single out Gay male culture as making ethically and aesthetically important contributions to humanity. Nimmons goes so far as to praise the huge dance events for Gay men and their allies called the Circuit (156–68), as does Barbara Ehrenreich in her popular book on festive culture, *Dancing in the Streets* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

These books are often dismissed as clever readings in pop culture rather than scholarly works. Nevertheless, Crimmons, Nimmons, and Ehrenreich have reached hundreds of thousands of readers, many more than the typical academician could ever engage, and they do it by writing in an entertaining and accessible fashion. I hope to reach a fraction of that larger audience who might never buy a scholarly text such as *The Fierce Tribe* for fear it would bore them.

The Fierce Tribe is an ethnography based on information gathered from members of the Circuit community and my own lived experience as a U.S. Marine, a participant-observer studying African Brazilian religion, a scholar versed in multiple academic disciplines, a Circuiteer, a Straight man for the first thirty-eight years of my life, and a Gay man for the last twelve years. This text is also teleological: it advocates for the Circuit, an outlaw community, by portraying it as a positive model for performance of nonviolent masculinity.

A Circuit event is a carnivalesque exercise in excess. Its members gather for weekends at a time, dance much more than they sleep, get



Lynn McStatts, www.personalpaparazziatl.com

Couple at Pensacola Abracadabra 2007

intoxicated as they dance, and renegotiate barriers that separate them as they engage each other sensually, comically, and emotionally. The Circuit community may appear undisciplined to outsiders, and in many ways it is. It does not, however, lack discipline in preparation and performance. There are many forms of personal and social discipline (grooming, weightlifting, diet, self-control, presenting a public face, verbal virtuosity, strong taboos against physical violence, knowledge of intoxicants and individual tolerances) that are part of the Circuit's *askesis*. But they may be practiced in ways that contradict the norms and laws of the larger Gay community and the general public.

The history of the Circuit community is intimately entwined with the history of the LGBTQ[1] community, which is marked by a tendency for festive resistance and an amazing capacity to laugh at oppressors. Experiences of Circuiteers as they congregate on the dance floor are grounded in performances of music and dance that have histories of their own in American popular culture. Participants draw from post-Stonewall expressions of festive Gay camp, and they express the ultra-masculine sexuality and muscular body-image of the iconic, macho-Gay clone. Music and movement developed for the Circuit are deeply rooted in both African American and military cultures. The spirituality that is generated at Circuit parties resembles ecstatic expressions of the Black church and traditional African religion, as well as the profound solidarity that men in uniform share as they march. It differs, however, from the solidarity formed in other predominantly male groups that engage in the production of violence. This difference could possibly be the Circuit community's greatest gift to humanity: the expression of masculine arrogance and aggression without the need to inflict physical harm.

Folklorists should have the courtesy to address the *folk* whose folkways they bring to the fore. My audience includes scholars, the Circuit community (especially the disc jockeys/DJs), military personnel, and the larger LGBTQ community with its Straight allies who are fascinated and repelled by the fabulous excesses of Circuit performance. Theory is used lightly in areas where it might interfere with the flow of the narrative. For the most part, I conscientiously avoid academic jargon whenever possible.

In trying to do so much and serve so many, this book has multiple cultural roots, histories, and voices that give the reader a clear idea of the Circuit, its length and breadth, its scandalous past, and its future promise. Several voices speak throughout the text: DJs, promoters, professionals from different walks of life, people who operate behind the scenes, and those who are strictly participants. There is a

1. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual/Intersex, Queer

brief commentary from a member or ally of the Circuit community[2] at the end of each chapter. Through these spokespeople, the community will hopefully have its multivocal say. *The Fierce Tribe* is meant to be entertaining, provocative, and accessible to as many readers as possible without dumbing down the text.

My approach utilizes elements from queer studies, men's studies, the anthropology of religion, somatics studies, and folklore.[3] This is by no means extraordinary; an interdisciplinary approach can be found in many ethnographies. As James Clifford says, "Ethnography is hybrid textual activity; it traverses genres and disciplines" (*Writing Culture* 26). The following is a brief description of how the disciplines influencing this ethnography influence my scholarship.

Queer Studies and Men's Studies

To view the Circuit through the lens of queer studies, I draw especially on Michel Foucault, who analyzes history by means of what he calls an archeology of ideas. Archives are the sites for his "digs," but rather than uncover "relations that are secret, hidden, more silent or deeper than the consciousness," he tries "on the contrary to define the relations on the very surface of discourse" and attempts "to make visible what is invisible only because it's too much on the surface of things" (*Foucault Live* 57–58). It is the use of discourse that is spoken, written, sung, and danced that informs my own archeology of ideas and critical analyses of the history of the Gay community, the Circuit, popular dance, African/African American music, and the military.

I subscribe to Foucault's ideas concerning the Gay community as a treasure-house of rich possibilities. Near the end of his life, Foucault postulated that the Gay community creates new kinds of pleasure and new kinds of friendships. "To be 'gay,' I think," Foucault says, "is not to identify with the psychological traits and invisible masks of the homosexual, but to define and develop a way of life" (*Foucault Live* 310). Gay men should "use sexuality to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And no doubt that is the reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable" (308). The Circuit is an example of how the Gay community has successfully created new pleasures and new relationships.

2. The strategy of having lived-experience commentary (or oral history) at the end of each chapter is taken from Nan Alamilla Boyd's *Wide-Open Town*, a historical ethnography of Queer San Francisco.
3. My educational background includes a BA in philosophy (Berea College), an MA in cultural anthropology (University of Hawaii–Manoa), an MA in comparative studies (emphasis on religious studies and folklore, Ohio State University), and a PhD in education (cultural studies/somatic studies with an emphasis on folklore, Ohio State).

My analysis touches on feminist theory about masculinity as expressed by Judith Butler. Gender is *supposed* to be natural, not artificial or stylized. Nevertheless, gender *must* be staged and stylized:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* [italics in the original]. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (*Gender Trouble* 179)

This is masculinity's dirty little secret: it does not spring unbidden from real men; they must practice it to the point where it flows seamlessly from them without any apparent effort or forethought. Butler's concept of *performativity* (performance that must not appear to be performance) states that the two very different commands issued to Straight masculine men to "act like a man" and "be a man" (which then get eroticized and/or replicated by Gay men) become perversely identical.

Even more influential on this work is the Queer scholarship of Michael Warner, author of *The Trouble with Normal* and editor of *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Warner coined the term *heteronormative*, the understanding that "humanity and heterosexuality are synonymous" (*Fear of a Queer Planet* xxiii). Worldwide perceptions of heteronormative masculinity tend to link masculinity and violent aggression, a presupposition that I call into question with an analysis of alternative masculine forms of nonviolent expression and aggression found in the Circuit.

Warner criticizes notions of sexual shame that the Gay male community absorbs from heteronormative hegemony, including shame derived from participation in Circuit parties. I make use of his statements about sexual shame and the stigmatized identity of Circuit boys within the Gay community to question (as Warner does) the assumption that such behavior is necessarily immoral (*The Trouble with Normal* 1–40).

Scholars in men's studies such as Michael Kimmel and Michael Kaufman have also subverted the notion that masculinity is monolithic while nevertheless observing that the general features of many heteronormative masculinities have much in common, particularly with regards to misogyny, homophobia, and violence. *The Fierce Tribe* is a continuation of their work.

Anthropology of Religion

Ethnographic influences taken from the anthropology of religion include Victor Turner and his work on *communitas*, especially his

seminal work, *The Ritual Process*, in understanding the dynamics of *communitas* and what kind of *communitas* is at work. In conjunction with Turner and *communitas* is Emile Durkheim and his notion of *effervescence*:

> The idea of a religious ceremony of any importance naturally elicits the idea of a festival. Inversely, every festival has certain characteristics of a religious ceremony … its effect is to bring individuals together, to put the masses into motion, and thus induce a state of effervescence—sometimes even delirium—which is not without kinship to the religious state. (Durkheim 386–87)

Durkheim's insight is useful in defining the ecstatic experience of the Circuit and perceiving its connections to religious ritual. However, some of my collaborators within the Circuit community link their experiences to a primitive, primal, pan-human source. I do not; my approach is intersubjective and cross-cultural, not universal.

Along with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the *carnivalesque*, theories proposed by George Bataille concerning transgression and excess are important in understanding the Circuit as a phenomenon with positive economic and political ramifications. Bataille frames the history of humanity in terms of both excess and transgression. In his general outline of surplus dedicated to war (e.g. the Muslim caliphate in the first few centuries after Muhammed, *The Accursed Share Vol. I* 81–91), or surplus dedicated to festival (traditional Tibetan society before the Chinese Communist invasion, 93–110), one can envision warfare and festival as alternatives for the production and consumption of surplus. It is within this framework that the performance of large-scale religious violence described by Mark Juergensmeyer in *Terror in the Mind of God* can be situated, in contrast with the carnivalesque hilarity, sensuality, and inebriation found in the Circuit. I privilege festival over war as the better, more humane, means for the performance of transgression and excess.

My ethnographic methodology is based upon the discipline imposed upon me when I did fieldwork on African Brazilian Candomblé. My mentor, Dr. Júlio Santana Braga, insisted on a protocol of respect for the privacy of the community. This protocol became the blueprint for my own research practice and my professional ethos.

Braga is a man who lives comfortably in two worlds. Recognized in Brazil as an authority in the field of anthropology on African and African Brazilian religion, Braga has been regularly published in Brazil and overseas for his groundbreaking work on Candomblé spirituality, its importance in African Brazilian civil rights, and the *magico-religious* world that the Candomblé community occupies. He is also a respected

babalorixa ("father of the gods" or chief priest) and is currently the spiritual leader of the House of Axé l'Oya in Bahia, Brazil.

It was Júlio Braga who brought me into the religion as an ethnographer-participant. I became part of a tradition of scholar and practitioner collaboration that has existed in Bahia for over a hundred years.[4] Because of my initiation as an *ogã* or male protector-mentor of Axé l'Oya, I pledge my loyalties to both the world of scholarship and the Candomblé community.

Although Candomblé is not as repressed as it was in the past, it is nevertheless still considered outside of respectable Brazilian values. My training in respectful ethnography as a means of legitimizing a stigmatized and formerly outlaw community such as Candomblé is reflected in my ethnographic work on the stigmatized and outlaw Circuit.

Somatic Studies and Performance Theory

The discipline of somatic studies focuses on the interrelationships between the experiences of the physiological and the psychological. According to Thomas Hanna, "The somatic viewpoint encompasses how we individually view ourselves from the inside looking out and how, from that viewpoint, the distinction between mind and body disappears" (*Somatics* 45). An understanding of how one perceives the body-mind-in-motion in the performance of pleasure are prerequisites for understanding Circuit spirituality and masculinity. Circuit DJs describe how they use music to move the body-minds of participants, unite a crowd into one communal body-mind, and generate a form of transcendent solidarity that is unique to the Circuit community. To understand how transcendence from self to group is achieved, I examine the effects of certain intoxicants in terms of the utilitarian purposes of those who take them, and the role of sensuality and hilarity as facets of public performance.

I take my cues concerning performance primarily from four scholars: Catherine Bell (ritual as performance), Richard Bauman (the performance frame), Erving Goffman (understanding performer, audience, and team), and Mark Juergensmeyer (terrorism as manly theatrical performance). I discuss the production of transcendent solidarity within a ritual frame by performers who are simultaneously audience. Transcendent solidarity is then framed as a core experience of

4. This collaboration began in the late nineteenth century with Dr. Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, Mãe (Mother) Pulchéria (Chief Priestess of the House of the Gantois), and Martiniano do Bonfim (professor of Yoruba and a high-ranking member of the Candomblé-de-Ketu elite). Mother Pulchéria accepted Rodrigues into her House, as a scholar who could help the persecuted community by conferring upon it legitimization as a valid cultural form, not a primitive criminal cult. As a spiritual child of Pulchéria, Rodrigues would also be honor-bound to respect his Mother, her House, and the religion she practiced.

masculine bonding that the Circuit shares with soldiers (legitimate) and religious terrorists (illegal, illegitimate). The nonviolent, more ethical expression of outlaw masculine excess and transgression found in the Circuit is then contrasted with a violent, less ethical expression found in terrorism and the ethically neutral/positive masculinity of the military. My goal is to present Circuit masculinity as an alternative for men seeking to become real men over the currently muddy ethics of warfare, sports, and public violence in general.

Folklore

Carol Burke says, "The job of any folklorist is to collect the lore of the folk group and to understand that lore in context" (8). The Circuit is situated in the larger context of the Gay community, which became fully self-actualized within the last forty years; the Circuit has been around for most of those four decades. Nevertheless, my research is difficult to situate within the restrictions of traditional folklore. The Circuit does not fit easily within Richard Dorson's division of folk, popular, and elite culture because it has elements of all three categories. Having survived major challenges to its continued existence over the last thirty-five years, the Circuit does conform, however, to Henry Glassie's statement: "the establishment of the folk nature of an idea is the demonstration of its persistence through time" (258).

But it does not fit Glassie's assertion that "the folk object, unlike the popular and elite object, is not a part of rapidly changing fashions" (258). The Circuit contributes and responds to rapidly changing fashions, thus troubling the trichotomy in ways that require a broader folkloric understanding of cultural fluidity and what constitute legitimate objects of study in the discipline.

Rather than seeing folklore/folklife as concerned with folk rather than popular or elite, it is better to understand folk culture as being interwoven with popular and elite culture, especially when dealing with Gay cultural expressions such as the Circuit. I hope that this book illustrates a point many folklorists make: folklore is poised extremely well to take advantage of many disciplines simultaneously because it is inherently multidisciplinary. We as folklorists do better work when we un-discipline ourselves,[5] when we open up our conceptual and methodological borders to capture, as much as we can, the full flavor of human expression that is not formally determined or mediated. Folklore functions better as a net than a niche.

5. I use *un-discipline* in the sense of becoming interdisciplinary and that such a position presents, in the words of Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye, "undisciplinarity/interdisciplinarity as intellectual alternatives to the disciplines and as bases for theoretical and methodological innovation" (Greenhill and Tye 9).

Here as elsewhere, this opening of borders includes subversion of the boundaries between the ethnographer and the folk. The participant-observer must, as Danny Jorgensen tells us, become the phenomenon that is being studied (62).[6] I recognize that my positionality as an ethnographer with insider status in the Circuit prevents the establishment of clean lines between my identities as scholar and practitioner.

I subscribe to David Hufford's category of *core experience* to relate the bonding experience of the Circuit to other forms of communal bonding. I call this core experience "transcendent solidarity," the unification of individuals into one *corpus* through shared ecstasy. I use, as Hufford would say, "experience based theory" ("Beings" 11) on the premise that the lived experience of Circuiteers is valid and worthy of study, and that their witnessing is the best source of information concerning the core experience of transcendent solidarity. I do not subscribe, however, to Hufford's assertion that "A core experience will occur in all populations regardless of cultural references" ("Beings" 32). I am cautious about asserting any cultural universals.

In her research on altered states, Erika Bourguignon proposes that the presence of altered states in religious ritual is a worldwide phenomenon (Bourguignon 137). Such altered states are, borrowing Hufford's terminology, a set of core experiences, each one shared by many different spiritual communities and interpreted in myriad ways that need not agree with each other, but with cross-cultural psycho-physiological traits in common. I do not claim, however, that Circuiteers' communal experience of transcendent solidarity is the same core experience as sacred trance in Candomblé. I would contend only that there is a common spiritual heritage in terms of rhythm, music, and dance.

One clear distinction in these core experiences is the necessary presence of non-corporeal spirits in Candomblé and the rare appearance of such spirits in the Circuit. Hufford defines "spiritual belief" as "the belief that spirits and a distinctly spiritual domain exist" ("Beings" 15). Circuit spirituality, however, is non-religious and noncommittal about the existence of nonliving spiritual beings. The spirits honored by Circuiteers on the dance floor are their own. This is different from the spiritual beliefs of most organized religions, including the cosmology, highly liturgical praxis, and multiple deities of Candomblé. The core experience of transcendent solidarity within the flexible spirituality of the Circuit need not result in a coherent belief system at all. As a secular-based, spiritual community, belief in anything—even belief in the shared experience of transcendent solidarity (which remains

6. I did not join Circuit-folk in order to study them, however. I was first a member of the Circuit community who then decided to formally observe it as an ethnographer.

unmarked, unregulated, undisciplined, and unenforced)—is not a prerequisite for membership in the Circuit community.

My background as a scholar of religion, an initiated member of the Candomblé community, and a participant-observer in the Circuit community informs how I outline the core experience of the Circuit as a spiritual praxis that does not dictate beliefs to its proponents. The relative unimportance of belief is not without precedent in more disciplined and codified spiritual praxes; Candomblé is based on a profound respect for ritual propriety and etiquette shown to the living, the dead, and the gods without a necessary belief that the dead and the gods exist as sentient beings. Candomblé and Circuit communities place little value in creeds or dogma.

Ethnographies establish researchers' credentials as legitimate scholars. They also tend to legitimize cultures. In his article, "Belief and the American Folk." Patrick Mullen offers an insightful analysis of folklore at the turn of the millennium:

> We as folklorists have a tendency to celebrate the people and communities we work with, and as a result we have produced numerous valuable, although sometimes overly idealized, studies of marginalized cultures. We have turned away from the overt pathologizing of the folk but not completely from idealizing and romanticizing them (130–31).

When the folk are praised, folklorists praise themselves. Folklorists often court the admiration of the folk by being their champions. Such affirmation, idealized as it may be, is a means by which the folk gain self-legitimization and the respect of others. This tendency is, basically, an insider's emic position, rather than an outsider's etic one, and should be acceptable as long as folklorists clearly state their positionality.

Ethnographies can be sites for the production of pleasure for folklorists and the folk, but praising the folk is not the only means of pleasure available to folklorists who wish to engage those who read their works. Negatively criticizing the folk can generate pleasures associated with insult, confession, exposé, and status reassurance. Academic and nonscholarly audiences love dirt as well as glitter.

Personally, I find it necessary to dish on (describe the scandalous) Circuit folk, especially as counterpoint since I idealize the Circuit community as the possessors of a form of masculinity that could lead to world peace. I would appear naïve, uninformed, or even fanatical if I did not titillate the reader with some confirmation as to how harmfully excessive and transgressive the Circuit community can be. By dishing *and* idealizing the Circuit, I hope to avoid excessive pathologizing or romanticizing the community.

Hufford says, "A reflexive account of our knowledge-making work can give us a more accurate sense of where we are, because it will always require us to tell how we got there" ("Scholarly Voice" 74). With my feet dancing in both worlds—those of scholar and folk—I understand the importance of being reflexive and transparent. We as ethnographers should tell our readers how we got there. Nevertheless, I refuse to tell *everything*, especially when it involves intimate, confidential knowledge of participants.

In order to maintain the ethos of respect that I learned in Brazil, I adhere to the *reciprocal ethnography* of Elaine Lawless, which entails a commitment to modify reflexive ethnography away from self-absorption. I heed Lawless's criticism that many of those who engage in reflexivity "are talking about ethnography more than they are doing it":

> My work with these women [Pentecostalist preachers] is reflexive in that I readily acknowledge my presence in the research and the possible and very real effects my presence has on the field experience. And my work is "reciprocal" in that we, the women and I, have established a working dialogue about the material, a reciprocal give and take. This process is not to be understood as reciprocity, where obligation or payment is the motivating factor—but reciprocal, in the (I hope) best sense of sharing and building knowledge based on dialogue and examined/re-examined knowledge.… While I fully acknowledge that I am writing this book, I am committed to presenting the work as collaborative, as dialogue, and as emergent, not fixed. (61)

For these reasons, I have included commentary from a member or ally of the Circuit at the end of each chapter in this book. But reciprocal ethnography has not been employed equally with all the groups that are discussed in this work; there are only five soldiers (two active duty) who speak in it, and five no-longer-active Ravers. Nevertheless, I have some credentials representing these groups. I have insider status as a soldier (United States Marine Corps, graduated from Parris Island on March 17, 1983). I have attended seven or so raves, including the grand Ultra Music Festival in Miami in 2007 and 2008. But I have never attended a terrorist training camp, nor have I corresponded or associated with any known terrorists. One can only do so much.[7]

Definitions: Spirituality and Religion

"Spirituality" and "religion" are defined here within a spectrum of possibilities. *Spirituality* is a personal relationship between human beings and the divine. *Religion* is a codification of that personal relationship.

7. Nevertheless, terrorist voices are in the last chapter via quotes taken from Mark Juergensmeyer's book, *Terror in the Mind of God*.

These definitions are similar to those of Robert C. Fuller in his work, *Spiritual, but Not Religious*, concerning what he calls "unchurched people." Fuller says that there is a significant group of Americans who define themselves as spiritual without subscribing to any religious denomination:

> They feel a tension between their personal spirituality and membership in a conventional religious organization. Most of them value curiosity, intellectual freedom, and an experimental approach to religion. They often find established religious institutions stifling…. Genuine spirituality, they believe, has to do with personal efforts to achieve greater harmony with the sacred. For them, spirituality has to do with private reflection and private experience, not public ritual. (4)

Although many people claim to be spiritual but not religious, the two terms are better understood in relation to each other rather than in opposition. Instead of asking if practices or persons are either spiritual *or* religious, the issue would be determining how they are spiritual *and* how they are religious.

I also seek to bridge the gap between an etic, secular perspective on group experience and an emic spiritual one, between Durkheim's *effervescence* as a strictly collective phenomenon triggered by group dynamics and emic claims that such a phenomenon transcends the group that performs and experiences it. We as scholars should feel free to take such emic claims seriously. We can stand on middle ground; these ecstatic experiences need not be explained away with purely secular as opposed to spiritual interpretations. We can frame unchurched, untempled, and unmosqued rituals of collective effervescence as secular and spiritual without necessarily having to certify their spiritual efficacy.

When dealing with spirituality, I am taking my scholarly inquiry into the mystical realm of the unspeakable. As George Bataille says, in beautiful language bordering on madness,

> The object of desire is the universe, in the form of she [sic] who in the embrace is its mirror, where we ourselves are reflected. At the most intense moment of fusion, the pure blaze of light, like a sudden flash, illuminates the immense field of possibility, on which these lovers are subtilized, annihilated, submissive in their excitement to a rarefaction which they desired. (*The Accursed Share* Vol. II 116)

This is, as Foucault tells us in equally evocative language,

> The zone of Bataille's language, the void into which it pours and loses itself, but in which it never stops talking—somewhat like the interior, diaphanous and illuminated eye of mystics and spiritualists that

> marks the point at which the secret language of prayer is embedded and choked by a marvelous communication which silences it. (*Religion and Culture* 69)

In asserting the existence of Circuit spirituality, I try to speak softly about that zone of lovely insanity and avoid the temptation to rationally describe the lived experience of transcendent solidarity as other than a collective and beautifully undisciplined prayer performed by cracked-out, horny mystics whose communal voice "is embedded and choked by a marvelous communication which silences it."

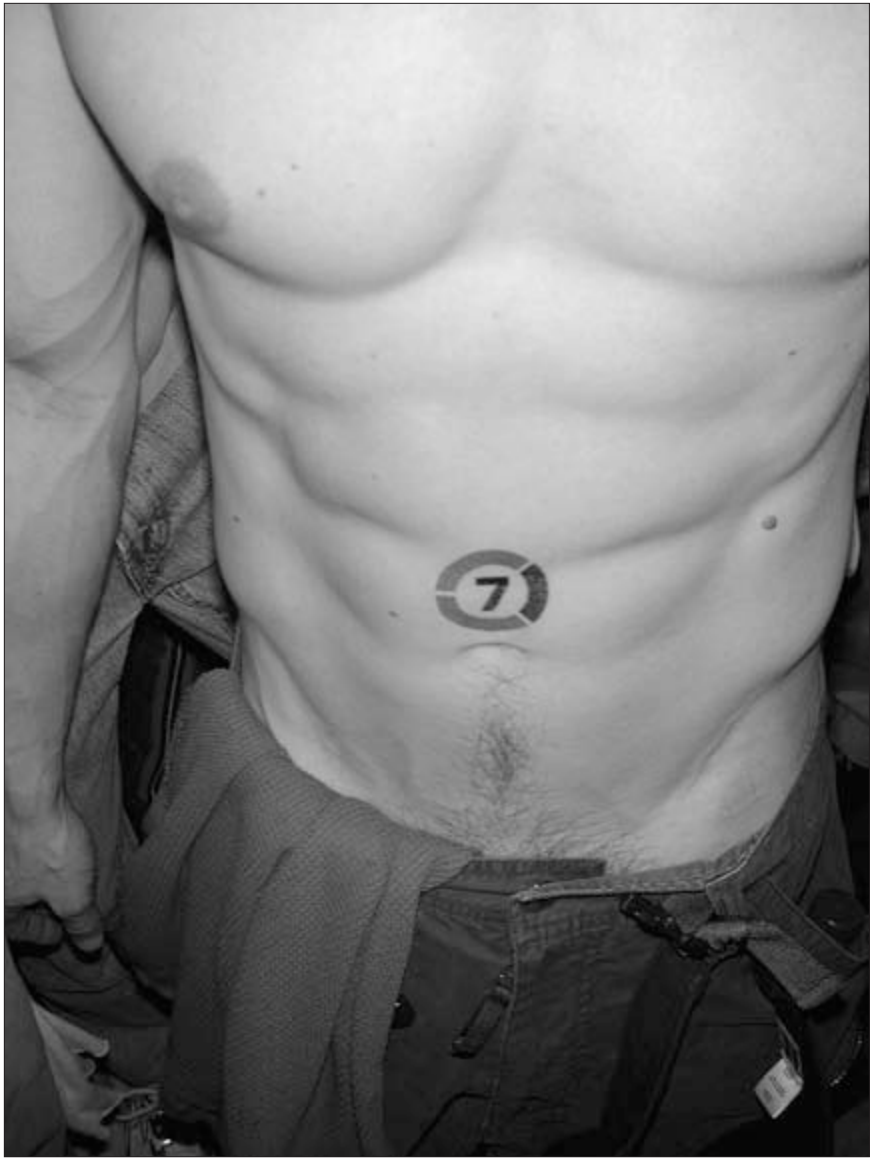
Labels and Lingo

Certain words are capitalized to indicate community affiliation. For example, "Straight," "Gay," "Queer," "Lesbian," "Bear," "Leather," "Black," "White," "Circuit," "Circuiteer," "Rave," and "Raver" refer to marked communities. When not capitalized, those terms that have dual meanings are used in their non-social senses. The word "straight," for example, means "not bent."

General categories that deal with gender, sexual orientation, and biological sex are not treated as marked communities because they are more applicable to populations from which communities may or may not be derived. "Feminine" and "masculine" are terms that deal with gender identity and its performance, as are "femme," "butch," "nelly," "macho," and "drag." The words "female" and "male" refer to biological sex, not social constructs. The words "homosexual" and "heterosexual" are sexual orientations, not communities. One can be homosexual (an orientation) and not be Gay (a member of a community that includes and celebrates diversity in orientation, gender expression, and sexual physiology).

One of the richest words in this book is "house," which can refer to a Candomblé religious community, a non-sanguinal family of inner-city Gay men who compete in the Ballroom scene, an overarching category for many genres of electronic music, and a dwelling place. Since *house* signifies communities in the first two cases, it will be capitalized in reference to them, but not the third and fourth definitions.

I also want to include as much of the rich verbal wordplay of the Circuit as possible. Words like *hottie* (good-looking person), *fag* (term of endearment between Gay men), and *fierce* (awesome) are employed in the text to give the reader an approximation of how they are used in Circuit verbal performance.



Bill Haberkam and JustCircuit, www.justcircuit.com

Creative advertising by a fan of DC Cherry 7

Introduction: Fascists and Whores

For too long, we [Gay men] have lied about our best selves.…
By rote we rag about too many drugs, moan over meaningless sex,
complain over too many muscles and too much competition,
censure the circuit, decry shallowness, bitch over body obsession …
muscles (bad), too much sex (bad), too little sex (bad),
circuit and [illegal] substances (bad and worse),
barebacking[1] *(REALLY bad) …*
and oh, did I mention body fascism?

—David Nimmons, *The Soul Beneath the Skin* (214)

The Circuit, a series of dance parties where thousands of shirtless men get inebriated, flirt, and dance with each other, caters to a community full of narcissists and drug users. Two Circuit stereotypes say it all: *body fascists*, men who judge others solely on physical beauty, and *crack whores*, those who use illegal intoxicants. Like most stereotypes, they reflect a facet of the truth. Although narcissism and illegal drug use[2] have never been prerequisites for membership, and not everybody in the Circuit is a body fascist and/or a crack whore, these stereotypes give critics of the Circuit plenty of reasons to condemn it.

As a playground for body fascists and crack whores, the Circuit has a sacred dimension. This is based upon my own experiences on the dance floor and the testimonies of countless participants over the years, often reported to me at the very moment they are in the throes of ecstatic rapture. These fascists and whores are not violent, even though they might be more muscular, do more drugs, and be much more sensual in public when compared to the average man. In much of Straight male culture, muscle equals potential to inflict physical harm, drugs are associated with thugs, and sex is an incentive to fight with potential rivals. The spirituality of the Circuit subverts these basic masculine premises.

My research has an agenda: I am appalled by the wars, terrorist acts, riots, drive-by shootings, physical assaults, and infatuation with violence that my fellow men consider to be essential to performances of masculinity. If many men have to be excessive (a human trait that is culturally gendered), and if the expression of masculine excess must

1. Unprotected anal sex.
2. Every Circuit event without exception discourages illegal drugs.

be transgressive (what I call *outlaw*), the men of the Circuit have discovered a way to eliminate the violent dimension that too many guys enter when they express their manhood. The Circuit community has social dynamics that could help eliminate much of the violence that men perpetrate across the globe every day in the name of Heaven and their *cojones*.

There are many outlaw communities (a blanket term for any community that depends on transgressive behavior for its identity) engaging in performances of masculinity that generate pleasures associated with spiritual experiences, even when the groups are avowedly secular. Some of the most violent communities are extralegal and set apart from civic law, such as the armed forces. Others are illegal, such as terrorists. The Circuit is somewhere in between, a nonviolent outlaw community with its own peculiar spirituality based on dance, rhythm, sensuality, hilarity, altered states of consciousness, and being Gay. Spirituality in the Circuit is marked by the experience of intense solidarity through communal dance, a phenomenon that is generated in spite of some unsavory and even dangerous characteristics associated with Gay men in general, such as body fascism, unsafe sex, and overdose/addiction.

A positive outcome of Circuit secular spirituality is the creation of a nonviolent masculinity that is appealing to both Gay and Straight men. The Circuit generates behaviors, relationships, and ethics that could reduce violence on a global scale if all men learned to adopt them: muscle as overwhelmingly attractive rather than threatening, arrogance and vanity expressed through disdain rather than physical aggression, masculine signifiers of violence as accessories for sexual pleasure, ethical management of sado-masochistic tendencies, informed awareness of certain illegal intoxicants rather than their prohibition, and social bonding through appreciation for shared hilarity. These features of the Circuit could not possibly be generated if Circuiteers were not allowed to be excessive, or if the Circuit were made too respectable.

Claiming and reporting spiritual experiences situated within a distinctly non-religious and carnivalesque frame such as the Circuit can be problematic. Profound spiritual experiences on the dance floor are not enough to inspire the Circuit community to look beyond the next party. Although many of the events are fundraisers, there is no organized agenda for the betterment of humankind. A significant minority of Circuit participants will consistently exhibit blind, brute cruelty akin to fascism when dealing with those that they consider less beautiful. An even larger contingent will behave like shameless, drug-addled whores, both on and off the dance floor. And a small but troublesome

minority will ruin their lives and the lives of others by not learning to consistently practice safer sex or restrain their drug use.

Nevertheless, the shallowness of the Circuit community does not negate the fact that many participants are irrevocably changed by their experiences, even when they behave like body fascists and crack whores. The Circuit is not a religious revival or political movement,but it does provide a performance frame for intensely personal relationships with humanity and the cosmos. Within that frame, participants have experiences of transcendence as they bond together that just might have religious and political ramifications in their lives. It is up to the participants, however, to judge whether these experiences are indeed real or simply temporary fantasies.

One of the most important ingredients in the production of the spiritual experiences in the Circuit is unpredictability. Even though the formula for the parties has remained relatively unchanged for almost thirty years, each event brings with it new possibilities of interaction at an intense level of heightened perception. It is an arena in which what is possible is much more important than any agenda that people bring (or take away) with them.

It is important that the Circuit *not* become too disciplined. It must not be too predictable, too safe, too sober, too political, too religious, or too legal. The Circuit must remain outlaw if it is to be effective. People must be allowed to express their arrogance through body fascism, get cracked out on drugs, and transgress the usual rules of propriety in the safe space of a Circuit party just so they discover their own limits.

The self-affirming lessons of the Circuit and moments of deeply spiritual connection to the universe are tied to the *disciplined* performance of vanity, drug-induced insanity, and sensuality. Preoccupation with physical beauty that inspires body fascism is also incentive for people to achieve personal excellence in sculpting their bodies. The tendency to experiment with different intoxicants may also lead to profound awareness of one's own frailties, the limitless capacity of the mind to create illusion, and appreciation of moderation in the face of seemingly unregulated pleasure. Perhaps the most important thing that people learn is this: just because you *can* do something doesn't mean that one *should*.

Positive lessons come from the premium placed on public performance. There is constant pressure on every participant to perform well in terms of the presentation of physique, dancing skills, cleverness in speech, and appreciation of hilarity, all while becoming progressively more intoxicated. Improved interpersonal skills and increased self-awareness are some benefits that come from joining the Circuit community and engaging in these challenging behaviors.

The notion that arrogance, intoxication, and sensuality in the Circuit can lead to self-improvement when embodied in communal dance fascinates me. In the midst of all that is wrong, I consistently find something wonderful about all of us when I go dancing with a few thousand of us.

Bill Haberkam and JustCircuit www.justcircuit.com

Fierceness personified: Circuit performance artist/DJ Power Infiniti onstage with dancers

Part 1

Fierce

Original photo by Ric Brown and Bulldog Productions, www.bulldogproductions.net; design by Kevin Mason

Circuit icon: the muscular male torso. This image was used to advertise the first Qualia parties in Columbus, Ohio.

Chapter 1

Banishing the God of Mediocrity

Since, therefore, God is everywhere,
those who are everywhere follow along with him,
out of their desire contemplate him eternally—
they exalt in that one and dance around[1]
as if they were at a party.

—John of Scythopolis, sixth-century Byzantine theologian (Rorem and Lamoreaux 162)

When I first came out, I felt out of place in the local Gay scene. Most of the Gay men I knew were effeminate and not into bodybuilding—I had little in common with them. I used to tell people I was "stray," that is, both Straight and Gay. I finally came to the conclusion that I was a Straight guy who happened to sleep with other guys. I was especially attracted to men like myself, but they seemed so few.

That was before I attended my first Circuit party: Columbus, Ohio's Red Party, 1998.

I remember walking into a large venue and looking down from the balcony at a sea of shirtless men immersed in music and lights. Most of them were in decent shape; quite a few were muscular. A lot of them looked, sounded, and acted Straight, except for the obvious fact that they were dancing sensually with each other.

I was astonished at what I witnessed when I hit the dance floor. There were men who said they were Gay without the smallest hint of effeminate behavior or the slightest hesitation. They could easily pass for Straight but chose not to. This was the first time I had ever met "Straight-acting" Gay couples, and there were lots of them. I had not realized that such a thing was possible.

1. In Greek Orthodox Christian theology, the relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity that make up the one God is described as *perichoresis* ("dancing around," Guthrie 40).

What impressed me the most that evening was the lack of violence. All these well-built, sexed-up, and intoxicated men were socializing, but with very little swearing. Nobody shoved another in anger, and fighting seemed out of the question; aggression was expressed by icy disdain rather than fists. For the first time in my life, I felt completely at home.

This is not to say that there were no Circuit boys there who "acted Gay." Even though the behavioral norm of the Circuit is grounded in muscle and macho, every event is well stocked with screaming queens whose performance of femininity keeps the butch (ultra-masculine) types from taking themselves too seriously. There is usually a nice balance between the two performance genres. Many men casually switched back and forth between masculine and feminine behavioral codes with hilarious results, another possibility I had not considered.

There is an old parlor game in the Gay community: "If you could take a pill that could make you Straight, would you do it?" After discovering the Circuit, my answer changed to a resounding negative. Dancing in solidarity with other Gay men was more fulfilling than anything I had ever felt as a Straight man. It was also a hell of a lot more fun.

I was witnessing something significant in human history: the Gay men's movement as a large-scale social experiment in generating nonviolent forms of masculinity.[2] Beginning in the 1970s, this movement has been helping Gay men like myself express their manliness without physical combat in a dazzling variety of ways for almost forty years. Rejection of violence by Gay-identified men is now a global phenomenon; it occurs wherever men's Gay bars are allowed to exist. The social dynamics that mark the movement are most pronounced in the Circuit. In fact, the Circuit might be considered the movement's latest and grandest expression. I joined the Circuit with gusto.

During this early period of my new Gay life, I was doing field research on Candomblé, an African Brazilian religion. My focus of study was rituals that turn mortals into living African gods. During six trips to Brazil, I observed mediums going into trance and transforming themselves, body and soul, into their beloved deities. The Candomblé community calls its public ceremonies *festas*, the Portuguese word for parties. Indeed, these religious rituals are very much like parties. Participants (both mortal and divine) are expected to have fun.

People sing hymns that praise the gods, calling out to them, inviting them to appear. Women and men consecrated as spirit mediums dance to the intricate rhythms of sacred drums. The beat helps the mediums

2. In this context, "nonviolent" also includes the regulation of violence in the production of erotic pleasure between consenting adults that is found in the Leather/S&M community.

summon forth *axé*[3] (pronounced "ashé," meaning spiritual power and authority) and manifest the *Orixás* (Yoruba gods) lying dormant within them. When mediums go into trance and the gods arrive, members of the congregation happily greet them by shouting out salutations, smiling, clapping, and laughing. In turn, the gods dance and dance until, eventually, they are asked to leave. Exhausted and disoriented, the mediums return to normal consciousness.

Here is one important lesson I learned from Candomblé: that which makes us divine can kill us. Legends about the Orixás teach us that great spiritual power can cause tremendous sorrow.

The deities of Candomblé are far from perfect. All human beings are *omo Orixá*, children of the gods. We share their faults and strengths in our everyday lives, just as the mediums share in their glory as they dance in the joyful ecstasy of the festa. If left unchecked, however, ecstasy can be hurtful. Entranced mediums don't always know when to stop. They might dance themselves to death.

Mediums learn the fabulous and tragic sides of the deities within them as part of their initiation. They are taught to control their *santo bruto*, their undisciplined divine identity, so that they are not harmed by it. I have witnessed the struggle for internal harmony in mediums from the House of Axé l'Oya in Bahia, Brazil, the congregation into which I was initiated.

As I attended more and more Circuit events, I noticed parallels between the Circuit and Candomblé. Mediums and Circuiteers transcend the normal world through dance. The same African rhythms that transport mediums into divine trance are used in underground dance music[4] played at Circuit parties to send participants into altered states of perception.

I am not about to draw inappropriate conclusions to validate Circuit spirituality by equating it with Candomblé spirituality. A Circuit party is not a Candomblé festa. Nevertheless, Candomblé and the Circuit have similar techniques of ecstasy from common rhythmic roots.

I have personally felt moments of individual and shared ecstasy at Circuit parties that transported me from everyday reality into other

3. Since my background in Yoruba religion comes from my experiences as a scholar-participant in Brazilian Candomblé, I will use the African Brazilian spelling for Yoruba terms. *Orixá* is pronounced "Orishá," and *axé* is pronounced "ashé." I also follow the protocol of Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos's book, *Meu Tempo É Agora*, capitalizing *Orixá* as a sign of respect for the gods and those who honor them.

4. "Underground dance music" is a blanket term for those musical genres whose roots are in 1970s disco. The predominant style is house music (Fikentscher 5–6) and includes recognized forms such as trance, deep house, Afro-pop, bhangra house (from India), and techno-house. The Circuit—itself a subset of the underground dance music scene—includes lesser-known genres such as tribal and "screaming divas."

realms of existence. Movement, contemplation, and community bonding on the dance floor still bring me intense pleasures. In turn, these pleasures connect me to the universe with a sense of intimacy and happiness that is occasionally beatific.

When Gay men dance together, they summon forth their own spiritual power and authority. But spirituality has its dangers. It is because of powerful spiritual experiences, not the lack of them, that the Circuit has problems with addiction, self-loathing, and body fascism. The Circuit is a community of secular *santos brutos*, and infection/healing, substance dependency/psychic liberation, and beauty/arrogance shine through them like terrible, wonderful deities. Unlike Candomblé, however, the deities of the Circuit remain nameless, undisciplined, and impersonal. There is no initiation for Circuiteers to teach them how to handle the forces they summon.

These unnamed forces lie dormant within Circuit participants, the Gay male community, and humanity. They are rarely as splendidly apparent in the everyday world compared to a typical Circuit party.

The Circuit is different from the usual Gay male club scene in the way that muscle, masculinity, altered states, and hilarity are intensified, an expansion and exaggeration of the vices and virtues in Gay men's culture. The Circuit generates a cosmology in which the god of mediocrity receives no honor. This intensity attracts and repels people. Would-be participants want to see for themselves how fabulous it is but are not quite sure if they are fabulous enough to attend, or if they can control themselves once they get there.

There is an implicit promise that, at some point in the evening, people will be able to let their guard down and unite into one vibrant *corpus*. Circuit participants greet this moment with hands in the air, shouts, smiles, and laughter. This joyful communal bond is what keeps the Circuit alive and well. For most of the folks I know in the community, it ranks among the most important experiences of their entire lives. It is a form of collective amnesty, a blessing to all who share it. And it is highly, highly addictive.

The biggest challenge that faces members of the Circuit community is the realization that the pleasures generated by weekend-long parties must necessarily be short-lived.[5] Circuit boys and girls must learn the difference between mediocrity and moderation. Although there is

5. Emile Durkheim states, "a very intense social life always does a sort of violence to the individual's body and mind and disrupts their normal functioning. That is why it can last for only a limited time" (228). Karen Hartley, who regularly goes to Circuit events with her partner Michelle Stonelake, warns, "Everyone needs a release valve, and ours is the Circuit. This valve is to be opened only from time to time—not a fire hose!" (personal communication, January 2008).

remarkably little violence between individuals in the Circuit, significant damage may be self-inflicted by participants who simply do not know when to stop.They would dance themselves to death.

I have no wish to portray Gay men's masculinity as wholesome within the current set of American family values, nor do I want to describe the Circuit as a religious movement. I do hope to show that the Circuit is ethical, however, and that it can provide different ways to understand Gay men, family, masculinity, nonviolence, and what we hold sacred.

In terms of violence, Straight men are taught to project their anger onto others (resulting in damage beyond the self to targets that may include innocent bystanders),[6] while Gay men tend to inflict the damage onto their individual person (resulting in damage primarily to the self and indirectly to one's immediate circle of intimate acquaintances). Both extremes have serious consequences that should be addressed and managed to minimize negative impact.

But if given a choice, I would prefer that damage be self-inflicted rather than inflicted upon the innocent. War and terrorism are Straight men's games, and the ethical distinction between soldier and terrorist is not always clear when men prove themselves in the heat of battle. Actions such as suicide bombing, air strikes, torture, and violence against women and homosexuals are well within the rules of too many Straight men across the globe as they publicly express their masculinity and solidarity with their fellow men. With all the problems that Circuit boys and girls face, and all the damage some of them inflict upon themselves, the Circuit community has within it clues as to how we can manage the violence that comes with male bonding, transgression, and excess.

6. This is not to say that all Straight men are violent or that Gay men do not engage in war. Many cultures, however, encourage men to use violent speech and behaviors to certify their masculinity to those around them, and that proper targets for such violence are homosexuals and/or effeminate men.

Commentary: Lorenzo Cardim de Almeida

Bahia (Brazil)/Washington, D.C.
January 2008

I am a fan of Circuit parties and festas. I produce Calor parties in D.C., which are club and Circuit events, and I've had a strong connection with Candomblé all my life. I grew up surrounded by the sacred songs, the rituals. I used to go to festas and oferendas [ceremonies of offering] dressed in white when I was growing up in Bahia. But I never really got to know it until I lived in Washington, D.C. There is such a stigma against Candomblé in Brazil.

I first moved to D.C. in 1997 and spent a lot of time with the Candomblé community here. I wear a *patuá* [raffia armlet with the colors of one's deity] sometimes when I go dancing. My American friends don't understand why I wear it.

When I go to Brazil, I do my thing for the Orixás, give them candles and flowers. When I produce a dance party here in D.C., I incense the place beforehand and sing songs to the *santos*.

The first time I went to a Circuit party, which was D.C. Cherry 1999, I felt like I was in a trance, like I would at a festa. It was spiritual. When you go to a festa, with the music, the singing, the drums, the clapping, everybody's energy is focused on the same place. It puts you into something that is bigger than yourself. The same thing when I go to a Circuit party, with the music, the beat, everybody dancing. When I'm dancing in the Circuit, I feel like I'm not in my body any more. As simply as I can say it, it's a religious experience when you combine the music, drums, and beat. To understand Candomblé is to combine everything in one place. After a Circuit party, I feel the same way as I would if I were coming back from a Candomblé ceremony. I have an energy that I can't fake.

People try to get to that place where they are detached from the schedule, the money, when you have everybody at the same level and we are, like, touching and dancing and moving. We need to detach from the world because we forget our ethereal side, we forget that we can tap into that ecstatic level so easily, whether we are sober or not.

Over the last few years, crystal meth abuse has taken our dance floor to a less spiritual place. We've lost a lot because of excessive use of that drug. I'm not against any substance, but crystal meth abuse was pretty bad for a couple of years. It took away the spirituality. People did not focus. That's why I don't want to do *morning parties* [usually from around 5:00 to 8:00 AM continuing to noon to 2:00 PM] any more.

Chapter 2

The Few, the Proud, the Cracked

Not you, perhaps you, and never you.
Fierceness is always welcome.
These are role models.

—Alan T[1]

The Circuit community is a loose-knit, transregional association of men and women from many backgrounds that come together for extended weekends to dance. Circuit participants make up an urban nomadic community of revelers that reconstitutes itself for a few days and then disperses until the next Circuit party. In addition to the movement of bodies on the dance floor, there is also the movement of people from city to city and country to country. Originating in Manhattan, Circuit culture has spread across the United States and Canada to Mexico, Britain, Australia, Holland, France, Germany, Spain, Brazil, Israel, South Africa, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia.

The Circuit creates an intimate public space where muscle is privileged, intoxication is the norm, and sex is usually limited to what a man can do with his pants on while dancing. Aggression is limited as well; participants rarely attack each other with anything other than dirty looks and rude remarks.

Theoretically, the Circuit community is inclusive. Anyone can attend. There are no membership requirements per se concerning sexual preference, race, age (besides being over the age of eighteen), or appearance. One need not dance well or even walk. I have witnessed people dancing in wheelchairs at Circuit events.

The Circuit is not for everyone, however.

1. Alan T (Tibaldeo) is a famous personality/performance artist in Miami nightlife and a recording artist in electronic dance music. These words by Alan T are part of a soliloquy that Circuit Boy used in a Circuit anthem called "The Door" (words cited with permission of Alan T, copyright © pending 2008)

Circuit parties tend to be expensive. Event tickets for the weekend range from $150 to $600. A Circuit weekend can cost each participant well over $1,500 after tabulating costs for entrance fees, hotel, travel, food, and intoxicants. An estimated 200,000 Gay men worldwide participate in Circuit parties (Nimmons 157), so net expenditure would be somewhere around $300,000,000 per annum. This gives the Circuit community economic clout: some businesses cater to it, including hotels, airlines, clothing designers, and compact disc (CD) manufacturers.[2]

The average American/Canadian Circuit boy[3] is a White or Hispanic Gay male between the ages of twenty-one and fifty-five with some college education. Income level is between $20,000–$100,000 annually. [4] In terms of physique, most Circuiteers are of average build, although there is a large and cherished minority of men (around 25 percent) who have exceptionally muscular physiques.

Circuit parties are all about dancing. At the bigger events, it is possible to dance from 10:00 PM Friday until 4:00 PM Monday. Music, clothing, staged performances, venue decoration, and technologies for lights and sound encourage participants to dance and to unify the crowd into a single pulsing entity. Physical fitness (dedication to the gym and perhaps steroid use), personal grooming, and selection from a variety of intoxicants enhance the performance of self.

The premium placed on performance can be unnerving. Most participants attend the events in protective clusters of friends and lovers.

2. Many people who deal with the business end of the Circuit are reluctant to give actual dollar amounts raised by their parties. My numbers resulted from consultation with industry professionals such as Patti Razzetto of Dance4Life, and based upon the birth of new parties, the death of old ones, and the rebirth of a few dead parties. Since 2001, numbers in North America have dropped dramatically. There appears, however, to be a rebound since 2004–2005, as well as a growing international Circuit scene outside of the US and Canada. The numbers given here are conservative estimates that take into account both the downsizing and the resurgence of the Circuit.
3. My sources are not exclusively American and Canadian, but the vast majority are US/Canadian citizens. The events that I attended were in the United States and Canada, so my focus is on the American/Canadian Circuit. There is a review of the East/Southeast Asian Circuit at the end of this chapter.
4. Averages are based on my own observations of the Circuit and conversations with promoters and are similar to those of Mansergh et al (published in *American Journal of Public Health*) and Mattison et al (published in *Journal of Substance Abuse*). The Mansergh survey (295 participants in San Francisco) is more restricted in age range (78 percent between 25–39 years of age) but concurs with me in that 70 percent are White, 91 percent have an education past high school, and 79 percent have an annual income between $20,000-$100,000 (955). The Mattison survey (1169 participants from across the US) differs somewhat from Masergh in terms of categories: 76 percent Caucasian, 68 percent with a BA or higher, and 50 percent with an annual income of $50,000 or more (122). Both give an almost identical median age: 32 years (Masergh) and 33.5 years (Mattison).

Much of the networking in the Circuit is interaction between small groups, resulting in new friendships and alliances over the weekend. Participants congregate in specific places between events (often around the host hotel), transforming these places into safe havens by sheer force of numbers where men may hold hands, kiss, and let down their guard. If these places are already Gay ghettos, they become even more so for the weekend.[5]

Codes for dress and grooming reflect the kind of Circuit event it is. For those parties that are not masquerade parties, military gear parties, Bear[6] parties, or Leather[7] events, the norms are fairly uniform. Most men have short hair and smooth-shaved faces. They eliminate or trim chest, back, and neck hair. Although there can be a broad range in clothing options, a universally accepted outfit is blue jeans and a white sleeveless undershirt (known in the community as a "wife beater"). Boots or athletic shoes are standard footgear. Dancers usually remove their shirts after dancing starts in earnest.

There are Leather Circuit parties, as well as growing participation in Bear events, in which body fascism is enthusiastically rejected. For Bears and Leathermen, the rules for grooming are not so stringent. Clothing at Leather events usually features lots of leather and chrome accessories. The Circuit tendency to privilege the perfect physique and haircut is less pronounced.

Straight women, Gay men of African and Asian descent, men over sixty, and drag queens are typically present at Circuit events in the United States and Canada. Straight men can be found as well but in fewer numbers (with the exception of Montreal Black and Blue).

The Dinah Shore Golf Classic in Palm Springs has inspired a Lesbian dance festival concurrent with the tournament, and may be considered a women's Circuit party. Many Circuit events (including Montreal Black and Blue, White Party Miami, White Party Palm Springs, Miami Winter Party, D.C. Cherry, Philadelphia Blue Ball, and Gay Days-Orlando) have separate women's dance parties. To my knowledge, however, there is no Lesbian interregional Circuit outside of the women's events held within the Gay men's Circuit, the Dinah Shore Classic, and Lesbian/Gay-oriented ocean cruises.

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5. Usually a protective social bubble envelops these areas and most homophobes tend to avoid them. However, homophobic Christian organizations have been invading some of these spaces (such as Gay Days at Disney World in Orlando and New Orleans Southern Decadence in 2003–2005) to protest what they consider to be the revival of Sodom.
6. Bears are Gay men who celebrate being gentler, heavier, and hairier.
7. Leathermen are Gay men who mark themselves as sado-masochistic participants by wearing black leather clothing, although such clothing is sometimes worn more as a fashion statement than as an identity/community marker.

Circuit parties tend to be themed. The White Parties, for example, usually inspire attendees to dress in white. Themes often feature fantasy settings and may have spiritual references. The theme for the Philadelphia Blue Ball 2004, for example, was "Ascension" (a recently-invented party on Fire Island is called Ascension as well), and Chicago Fireball 2003 featured a performance with a live gospel choir. During Montreal's Black and Blue 2000, participants walked with candles through a giant candlelit red AIDS ribbon on their way to the dance floor.

Participants maintain communal ties by means of Circuit-based literature and computer sites that help them keep up with the music, the DJs, and each other between parties. Virtual communities exist by means of listservs and message boards.[8] The Circuit also has its own folk media through printed and online news. *Edge*, a national online publication, has a permanent section entitled "Circuit Parties" for the latest updates on events and interviews of people in the scene. There are two quarterly magazines dedicated to the Circuit, *noiZe Magazine* (formerly *Circuit Noize*) and *JustCircuit.Mag*, which have articles, reviews, and photographs as well as advertisements for upcoming events.

Preferred intoxicants include a range of recreational drugs, the most popular being alcohol, MDMA (also known as ecstasy, X, or E), ketamine (K), GHB (G), cocaine, crystal methamphetamine (crystal), tobacco, and marijuana. Due to legal prohibitions against most of these substances, it is impossible to accurately determine how many participants take which drugs.

Participants often refer to themselves as a tribe; some describe their experiences of transcendent solidarity in shamanistic terms. The parties, they say, bond people together by putting them in touch with what they perceive as primeval spiritual feelings. They subscribe to the following *mythos*: human beings have accessed such feelings all over the world through intoxication and ecstatic dance since the dawn of time. The Circuit is but a recent version of cosmic tribal solidarity. Within this transcendental context, some participants find that the Circuit is also a site for the living to bond with the dead.[9]

Male members of the Circuit community are often referred to as "Circuit boys," a term that is not necessarily a compliment. For Gay men outside of the Circuit, it implies that one is shallow, arrogant, and drug-addled. In the spirit of playfulness that the community possesses

8. Party List, Just Circuit, Circuit Party Insanity, and Circuit Life are some of the more popular listservs and Web sources of information.

9. *Flaggers*, dancers who artfully wave large pieces of colorful cloth, are considered by many to be the most spiritual side of the Circuit. Usually an individual activity, it often puts the flagger into deeply introspective states. Some claim to encounter dead companions while flagging.

in abundance, participants exaggerate their own outlaw identity and fondly refer to each other as "crack whores" or "cracked-out Circuit queens."[10] Well-built men are called "muscle marys." Illegal substances are given girl names as well, such as Stacy (MDMA or ecstasy), Tina (from "Christina" for crystal methamphetamine), Katie (ketamine), and Gina (GHB). The necessity for discretion in obtaining, ingesting, and talking about these substances bonds the community even closer.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the Circuit and the club scene. Circuit culture is best understood as an inseparable, intensified extension of Gay men's club culture. In many ways, a Circuit party is a night of clubbing writ large: more hours on the dance floor, more people, bigger spectacle, and music designed specifically for that crowd and played at just the right time by the best DJs in the business. Most Gay male dance venues play "Circuit music" (songs that are formatted specifically to the scene) as well as Top 40 dance music. The most *avant-garde* clubs introduce new music that will later play at Circuit parties, and vice versa. On holiday weekends in major cities, it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between the club scene and the Circuit scene. The two scenes are also geographically and economically interdependent. When a city hosts a Circuit weekend, local clubs hold most of the parties besides the main event.

Circuit music consists of house music between 125–135 beats per minute (bpm), about the pace of a brisk walk. Popular songs are often remixed (sonically reformatted) so that a three-minute tune is stretched out for six to ten minutes, a strong percussive backdrop is inserted, and "synth stabs" (strong blasts of synthesized riffs) play off the central melody. A lot of Circuit music comes from remixes made by DJs in the Circuit scene.

The Circuit has a well-established commercial side. Companies such as Centaur Music produce CDs specifically tailored to the Circuit community that feature the songs *du jour* mixed by popular DJs; they are sold on the spot at the bigger parties and distributed across the nation for sale in Gay men's boutiques and LGBTQ bookstores. Promotional materials feature advertisements for host hotels and airlines. Event T-shirts can be purchased or are provided in gift bags for those who pay more for VIP tickets. VIP status also includes the luxury of skipping long lines to get into the venues and admission into special VIP lounges.

The Circuit has its share of problems. Revenue from a Circuit weekend can lead to nasty competition among the host city's dance clubs. Big-party promoters will occasionally go head-to-head and plan

10. "Cracked-out" is street slang for being intoxicated on illegal drugs to the point of losing self-control. "Cracked-out" or "cracked" is synonymous with "messy" and "tweaked."

large-scale events that happen at the same time. Too often, competition splits up a good-sized crowd into two separate venues, disturbing the underlying sense of solidarity that Circuiteers expect from the experience, and siphons needed participants from established fundraisers. A stark example of unnecessary competition occurred on April 19, 2008, in Washington, D.C. when a for-profit Circuit party was held less than two hundred meters from the D.C. Cherry Main Event fundraiser.

Forgery has also been a problem. Since main events are $50–$100, and weekend passes can go for as much as $600, forged passes can seriously cut into profits. I know of two instances where promoters lost significant amounts of money due to fake tickets during the 2002 Hotlanta River Expo (reported to me by a participant years after the event), and White Party Palm Springs (I witnessed some men bragging about making VIP weekend passes for themselves in the host hotel lobby in 2001). In addition, embezzlement scandals have led to the end of a few Circuit parties and necessitated the restructuring of some organizations that sponsor events.

Members of the Circuit community refer to a pervasive attitude of body fascism, the obsession with physical perfection and the snobbery that comes with it. "Body fascist" is synonymous in some Gay circles with "Circuit boy."

The desire to have a desirable body has inspired some participants to use steroids to increase their muscle mass. I have found, however, that folk wisdom linking steroid use with *'roid rage* (aggressive and violent behavior resulting from neurochemical imbalance due to steroids) is not supported by a marked increase in violent behavior among the overly muscular during Circuit parties, other than the tendency for a small minority of muscle queens to occasionally be physically pushy and to behave with insufferable arrogance toward those not deemed worthy of their attention.

Substance abuse also plagues the community. A couple of years ago, it was not uncommon to see comatose Circuiteers carted away in ambulances and hospitalized by the dozens over a big Circuit weekend because of irresponsible GHB use. Circuit parties also have a reputation for being hotbeds of HIV transmission.

In response to these health issues, concerned members of the community have conducted campaigns for safer sex and intoxicant harm reduction during Circuit weekends. Dr. Chris Mann of Dallas, Texas, created a volunteer organization (MedEvent) of doctors and nurses who work at events to reduce health risks.[11] Chicago Fireball held health summits

11. MedEvent personnel are licensed doctors, nurses, and EMTs who have been in the Circuit scene and are familiar with the ever-expanding range of intoxicants and combinations that Gay men concoct. MedEvent has state-of-the-art protocols that are,

and educational programs during its weekend, a tradition still carried on by Montreal Black and Blue. Pamphlets and posters at events in Toronto and Montreal remind participants to party responsibly. Many of the campaigns have considerable marketing savvy, using eye-catching models and outrageous humor to bring home the message.

In addition to safer-sex and harm-reduction campaigns, many parties raise funds for Gay causes, especially for AIDS charities. Philadelphia Blue Ball, D.C. Cherry, Miami's Winter and White Parties, Montreal Black and Blue, Gay Days–Orlando, Halloween's in New Orleans, Ascension in the Fire Island Pines, and Toronto Pride events donate a portion of their revenue to charities. This practice has created some controversy; some critics say that throwing parties that encourage irresponsible sexual behavior and then claiming that these parties are AIDS fundraisers is the height of hypocrisy (Signorile 118–27).

in many cases, superior to the standard practices of local health care workers. EMS personnel who are unfamiliar with the scene have been known to misdiagnose problems of Gay male patients, be it GHB seizures or HIV medication complications.

Commentary: Pei Chang

Los Angeles
March 2008

The Circuit scene in Asia is driven not only by economics and attendance levels but namely by the permission of the local government to hold a Circuit party at all. The biggest factor of whether or not a party is successful depends on the political climate and the ability to bribe the local officials to allow an event to happen. As such, the Circuit will drift toward the country that is most conducive to hold a large party at any given time.

The Circuit started in several different countries concurrently and you cannot pinpoint just one event being the catalyst. There were smaller local parties in each respective country that were natural offshoots of the mixed [Straight and Gay] Raves that were occurring. At each large-scale mixed Rave, there was always a section of Gay men dancing shirtless that was easy to spot.

It was the Nation party in Singapore that really put the traveling Circuit as we know it on the map. Nation was put together by Fridae.com, the largest LGBT portal in Asia. The founders were mostly a bunch of Gay Singaporean men who loved to party in the United States and saw an opportunity to bring that type of large party to Asia. This also coincided with liberalization of the Singaporean government, which allowed these parties to thrive alongside the opening of Gay bathhouses within the conservative country. The party started small and quickly grew. However, once the party started becoming noticed by the likes of the *Wall Street Journal* and *TIME* magazine, the government got concerned about how it would be perceived, slammed it shut, and started a severe crackdown on any and all parties within Singapore.

The party scene continually shifts from year to year. Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, once major destinations of the past, are now out due to current governmental persecutions of the party.

The last Nation party occurred in Thailand a couple of years ago. From that, numerous new parties in Bangkok sprang forth for both Songkran, the water festival, and for the annual fall party. Taiwan is the other country of circuit choice right now for Asia. It has the summer Gay Days party (no relationship to the Gay Days Orlando party other than the name) and New Year's Eve. There is also an ongoing party in Japan called Ageha. This party is similar to Alegria. It takes place four to five times a year and the boys fly in from all over to attend the one party. They take the bullet train from Tokyo to attend these all-

night festivities. When the train commences again at 6:00 AM, hoards of Circuit boys can be seen waiting at the station. Unlike the other Circuit parties, this one is not a weekend of events, but a single event of renowned status.

These parties bring out thousands of much-needed tourist dollars to the local economy and the governments of each of these countries are currently turning a blind eye to these events.

However, all of this can shift with an election or a lack of a bribe to the proper police officer. It's always tricky and dangerous to party in Asia. There's always a chance that the government will show up in the middle of a party and haul everyone off to be drug tested. The visitors will most likely be let off with just a warning since the government is trying to promote tourism. However, the locals will face fines, be made to go through drug rehabilitation, and possibly even face jail time. Although they like to party, the specter of getting arrested and doing jail time always looms in the back of their minds.

However, the desire of the boys to get together and bond over music and brotherhood still prevails. The genie has been let out of the proverbial bottle. The boys in Asia are part of a traveling Circuit that will draw them from one country to another in search of the next party. It does not matter if a party is curtailed in one country, it will just reappear in another. It is this unquenchable desire of being part of the Circuit community that draws the boys to different corners of Asia again and again.

Chapter 3

Thousands of Dancing Gay Men

Like everyone else here, I dance much of the night
like a madman. I take off my shirt
and make some "friends," those people
with whom you convince yourself
you have a profound connection—
until you realize it was "just the drugs."

—Michelangelo Signorile, "The Evangelical Church of the Circuit" (110)

Dance is powerful. It is a source of profound sensual, emotional, and spiritual pleasures for people from cultures around the world. At a certain level, people who dance for pleasure understand each other, in much the same way that people all understand what it is like to breathe.

I am a dancing fool. I dance around my house. I dance in the shower. I dance in my car when I drive. Sometimes I dance when I write. I would rather dance than eat, sleep, or have sex. I never dance alone, even when I am by myself. But I do not dance professionally.

Popular dance has more to teach us about ourselves as interactive social beings than professional dance because more of us dance recreationally, and we love it so much we do it for free. For those of us who are profoundly sonically driven, we will pay good money for the chance to, as Signorile says, "dance much of the night like a madman." The production of fun is serious business, and most people who attend Circuit parties find that the benefits of having a good time on the dance floor go far beyond taking their shirts off and making "friends" while on drugs.

The Circuit is part of the larger underground dance music scene. This larger scene includes Raves and annual gatherings such as the Winter Music Conference in Miami and Burning Man in the Nevada

Shane Rogers and JustCircuit, www.justcircuit.com

One Mighty Party in Disney World, Orlando, Florida in the Disney Studios. The building in the background is "Crossroads of the World."

desert. All of these communities and events promote ecstatic communal bonding through dance.

Understanding the social forces in dance cultures such as the Circuit is not easy because dance itself has not been adequately investigated. Since popular dance is often associated with intoxication and sexual irresponsibility, many societies consider it excessive, mindless, and bordering on the indecent.[1] In academia, popular dance usually takes a back seat to formal dance, such as ballet, tap, modern, and officially recognized forms of folk dance. College dance departments tend to be

1. This is especially true in Christian societies with roots in Western European Protestantism. There is an old Catholic joke about Baptists that I learned as a teenager: "Why do Baptists not allow premarital sex? Because it might lead to dancing."

more concerned with the production of stage performance than understanding nonprofessional dance, which usually falls in the domain of anthropologists and folklorists. Neither anthropologists nor folklorists, however, have developed workable language to deal with how or why humans move together to rhythm.

The excessive dancing and revelry of the Circuit make it a target for moral watchdogs within the Gay community. Critics such as Michelangelo Signorile blame Circuit parties for an assortment of evils, including HIV transmission, drug addiction, and phony friendships. I wonder, however, if the real problem is how these critics trivialize dance in general—if the root of their criticism is simply disdain for those of us who would waste our money, time, and brain cells on something so *frivolous*.

The history of the Circuit is that of an outlaw community (Gay men) that uses ethically suspect activities (communal dance, sex, and intoxicants) to create new social norms privileging tolerance, nonviolence, altered states, and festival. The privileging of the muscular body and standard masculine mannerisms can be seen as a movement in the Circuit community to normalize its constituents into adorable, beefy guys who just happen to have sex with each other. However, tolerance of illegal drugs, public sensuality, and rejection of masculine violence undermine standard Straight values concerning health, sexual shame, and machismo.

The Circuit has been condemned by several notable pro-normalist Gay critics and AIDS activists such as Andrew Sullivan, Gabriel Rotello,[2] and, of course, Michelangelo Signorile, who all agree (at least on this one point) that the Circuit is oversexed, overdosed, and undesirable. Some Gay spokespeople call for the end of the Circuit, which they see as nothing more than an excuse for taking illegal drugs and engaging in irresponsible sexual behavior.

At least one of the critics frames the Circuit in terms of spirituality, albeit phony spirituality. In *Life Outside*, Signorile calls the Circuit an "Evangelical Church," established upon the "sacraments" of steroids and club drugs, that preaches "the cult of masculinity" (131–32, 76, 31). Signorile views the Circuit in much the same way that Joseph McCarthy viewed communism; it is an insidious evil that covertly undermines society:

> The Evangelical Church of the Circuit is expanding and feeding the cult of masculinity, as its values and ideologies continue to filter down

2. In *Sexual Ecology*, Rotello speaks of "fund-raising circuit parties that implicitly foster, or wink at, drug use and unsafe sex," although he does add, "many party promoters have begun to express concerns and try to implement changes" (302).

> to all of the gay world…. It will continue to beckon us to return to a lost adolescence, with all the fun and reckless disregard that goes with it. It will continue to promote its *virtual* [italics in the original] friends and lovers, keeping many gay men from developing any real intimacy in their lives. It will continue to keep so many gay men awash in dangerous drugs…. It will continue to compromise many gay men's abilities to have safer sex and tempt them with the exhilaration of going "bareback." (131–32)

Some pro-Queer scholars such as Michael Warner are not so negative. Warner sees the Circuit as one more target for condemnation by those who want to be Gay but are ashamed of those who are too Queer:

> On top of having ordinary sexual shame, and on top of having shame for being gay, the dignified homosexual also feels ashamed of every queer who flaunts his sex and his faggotry, making the dignified homosexual's stigma all the more justifiable in the eyes of straights. On top of that, he feels shame about his own shame, the fatedness of which he is powerless to redress. What's a poor homosexual to do?
>
> Pin it on the fuckers who deserve it: sex addicts, bodybuilders in Chelsea or West Hollywood, circuit boys, flaming queens, dildo dykes, people with HIV, anyone who magnetizes the stigma you can't shake. The irony is that in this culture, such a response will always pass as sexual ethics. Larry Kramer and other gay moralists have made careers out of it…. (*Trouble* 32)

Circuit boys are a condemned community within a condemned community, a twofold example of what Erving Goffman calls a "spoiled public identity" (*Stigma* 107). Participants face the double stigma of being labeled as homosexuals by the general public *and* Circuit queens (substance-abusive narcissistic sex fiends) by the Gay community in general.

But stigma implies that the reasons why the Circuit is condemned might be undeserved, that somehow, the Circuit community is unfairly singled out and victimized. Although true up to a point, framing the Circuit community simply as stigmatized is not accurate. The term "outlaw," referring to the nonconformist, the undisciplined transgressor, one who rejects societal norms and takes risks rather than one who is unfairly oppressed, is just as applicable.

For many men, outlaw identity is an important marker for masculinity. Straight men base their peculiar obsession with pirates, bank robbers, and rowdy rock stars on a romanticized image of outlaws as real men who do not kowtow to the whims of society. This same impulse can be found in Gay men as well, but usually not with the fondness for violent stereotypes that are so attractive to their Straight brothers. There

is a love/hate relationship between the Gay male community and the Circuit, not unlike the attraction/repulsion Gay men feel toward strippers and porn stars, except that strippers and porn stars tend to carry more status than Circuit boys.[3]

Although most Gay men have heard of the Circuit and many have participated in it at some time or another, the majority of Gay men are either uneasy about it or condemn it outright, and their uneasiness is not without reason. The Circuit sits on the intersection of sexual desire, illegal drug use, the body beautiful, and public display—all areas of tremendous anxiety.

There are other reasons why the Circuit is not simply a stigmatized community. Societal rules are not the same for Straight men and Gay men, and Gay spaces tend to be used differently than Straight spaces.

Straights are likely to treat Gay men differently because they perceive them to be less violent, Take clothing, for example. Many Straight dance clubs have restrictive rules concerning dress for men: no clothes with sports team logos, no sneakers, no T-shirts, no tank tops, no ball caps. These items of clothing are thought to incite violence. The dress code for Gay male dance venues, however, is usually nonexistent. Circuit parties are even more open; shirts are optional. The Black Party in New York does not require any clothing at all.

Homophobia, usually portrayed as the bane of Gay society, allows the Circuit a degree of privilege by generating the "Gay bubble," an invisible force field around Gay public spaces. Here is an example: my husband Kevin Mason and I attended the Miami Winter Party 2003, an open-air, daytime Circuit event by the ocean in South Beach. The only thing separating the party from the rest of the beach was a thin plastic sheet about a meter and a half tall. I have seen men, especially men with their girlfriends, look in curiously, realize what is going on, and then abruptly snap their heads forward as if they were afraid that somebody might see them looking.

This same homophobia keeps many Straight male law enforcement officers away from Gay male establishments and Circuit parties. Straight male anxiety about overt homosexual behavior, especially in spaces where the presence of so many Gay men changes social rules of sensual propriety, have served to protect Gay male spaces from unwanted attention. As Gay men gain greater acceptance, however, the bubble is becoming less effective as a barrier.

The Circuit community is an increasingly visible outlaw community that exhibits the extralegal privilege of the soldier as well as the illegal

3. Privileging of the stripper and porn star over the Circuit boy may be due to the vanity of non-Circuit Gay men. At least strippers and porn stars are nice to anyone who is willing to give them money. Most Circuit boys are not for sale.

Kevin Mason

Miami Winter Party 2003

rejection of the rule of law of the criminal. By "extralegal," I mean the status of those groups who act outside of the civil code without censure, such as soldiers in the theater of war. The higher income and education level of Circuit participants, the care of the self that leads to enhanced physical beauty and muscle, and the fact that many events raise money for charities—all these factors reduce public censure of Circuit outlaws that other, less attractive, outlaws face. Add the lack of violence and the Gay bubble, and the average Circuit boy or girl has the potential to live in harmony with society rather than in conflict with it.

But that harmony can be disrupted when drug addiction, sexual irresponsibility, and unbridled vanity attract negative media attention. When allowed to proceed unchecked, transgression and excess can undermine whatever magic there might be when one spends a weekend with thousands of dancing Gay men.

Commentary: Victor Mauro

NYC/Miami
January 2008

While my family was busy running amusement parks in Long Island, I was growing up in the New York nightclub scene of the '80s. The Saint, the Limelight, and the Factory were my homes. The 1999 Winter Party in Miami was my first real Circuit event. It was also the first time I ever flagged. Over the last decade, flagging has become my passion. My husband, Shane Rogers, and I have worked with different Circuit events such as ReUnion in Disney–Orlando and White Party–Miami. We also produce JustCircuit.Mag and its Web site.

The Circuit is growing, changing, moving, and adjusting. Newcomers to the Circuit don't remember the Fire Island Pines parties or the trance music era. They've never heard of DJ Susan Morabito or Red Party in Columbus, Hotlanta in Atlanta, or Fireball in Chicago. Just as our parents pushed American History down our throats in grade school so that we in America won't repeat the past, it is our job to remind these newbies of what was good so that we *can* repeat the past and make the parties even better. We should educate those new to the Circuit scene with all that is good about an event weekend that allows responsible boys and girls to "let their hair down" and to, among other reasons, raise money for those who only wish they could join the party, but can't because of AIDS.

Let's face it. Paying hundreds and thousands of dollars to dance and play all weekend long at a Circuit weekend might not be for everyone. But for those of us who *have* experienced the Circuit's magic and *have* established and maintained friendships that are far from phony along the way, the very idea of protecting the Circuit is an honorable one. I for one will continue to pay the big bucks, dress up like a club kid, make a grand entrance to the main event, dance, flag like a wild man to the music and DJs that I love to hear, and feel good about it all until the end. I will do it responsibly, and I will do it all in moderation. And when I'm doing it for a good cause, I'll pat myself on the back and mark my calendar for next year's event.

Chapter 4

Fierceness

fierce (firs) adj. *1. Having a savage and violent nature; ferocious. 2. Extremely severe or violent; terrible. 3. Extremely intense or ardent;* fierce loyalty. *4. Strenuously active or resolute.*

—American Heritage College Dictionary

One of the highest compliments in the folk-speech of the Circuit community is to be called "fierce." One may have a fierce body, fierce attitude, or fierce haircut. A drag queen in a striking outfit may be fierce. DJs who play a good set are fierce. People who dance well are fierce. Those who are the life of the party are fierce. Divas and performance artists are fierceness personified when they radiate aggressive, magnetic individualism onstage. Fierceness is power. It is not, however, destructive power or deadly force—it is not savage, violent, ferocious,[1] or terrible.

Taken from the wordplay of African American Gay men in the Ballroom scene, [2] fierceness is often expressed as charismatic authority that demands admiration. Erikk "Bonkeisha"[3] Martin, a Circuiteer from Detroit, defines fierceness as cool confidence:

1. In current Circuit wordplay, "ferocious" or "ferosh" is gradually becoming synonymous with "fierce."
2. The Ballroom scene is a network of predominantly African American and Latin Gay male performers who organize themselves into *Houses*, extended families, that engage in contests of *realness* (different forms of identity performance) and *voguing* (stylized competitive dance that includes *runway*, mimicry of professional models).
3. "Bonkeisha" is his girl name. Gay men have had the tradition of taking on girl names for at least 300 years.

Bill Haberkam and JustCircuit www.justcircuit.com

Fierceness personified: participant at Montreal Black and Blue 2000

> Fierceness is when a person can work a stage without any props, backup dancers, or extravagant costumes. If you are in a situation where other people try to put you down, and you hold your own and get your way without losing your temper, you are fierce. (interview, July 2004)

Power Infiniti, performance artist and DJ from Miami, gives a similar definition: "Fierceness is originality, creativity, strength, someone who walks to their own beat" (interview, December 2007).

In the Circuit, fierceness is important in the spiritual performance of nonviolent masculinity. Three factors have been consistent in giving the Circuit its own fierce character in channeling aggression away from violent expression: physical attraction *to* the muscular body over physical intimidation *by* the muscular body, sensuality over sexuality, and us-for-us solidarity over us-against-them exclusion.

Attraction over Intimidation

Masculinity involves appearance and behavior that reinforce one's identity as a properly gendered male. It is supposed to be the natural outward signs of a man's inner being and his true essence. But the reality of masculinity is that it is the social performance expected of men, not a universal biological imprint that comes with being born male.[4] Expressions of masculinity are learned, not genetically encoded. Most men, Gay and Straight, become masculine through observation and the desire for the approval of other men and, to a lesser degree, women.

As sexual beings, our environment outside teaches us who we are supposed to be inside. As J. H. Van Den Berg states,

> [Sexuality] is not in the first place to be found "in the subject" or "on" his body, but shows itself as world. Sexuality appears in the other, who is met in the advertisement, the shop window, the reading matter, the landscape of the twilight, the aspect of the street. (109)

Images of manliness that boys are taught to become, however, are only occasionally realized. Men rarely become man enough. As boys, we see our role models and then look at ourselves, only to see that we do not measure up one way or another. This sense of inadequacy follows many men from boyhood into adulthood. Nowhere is it more apparent than in front of a full-length mirror.

Many studies of the male body focus on (or rather obsess with) the penis or its phantasmic super-shadow, the phallus. For some men, their dick (either literally or figuratively) is indeed their passport into manliness. But it is one small part of a much larger package. The most obvious form of embodied masculine power is a man's musculature. Shirts and ties can hide a pudgy belly somewhat; they do not hide a muscular frame. Regardless of one's status in the office, the factory, or the institution, a muscular body commands respect without even trying. Muscle indicates power, masculinized, irrefutable, casual power, even when that body belongs to a woman.[5]

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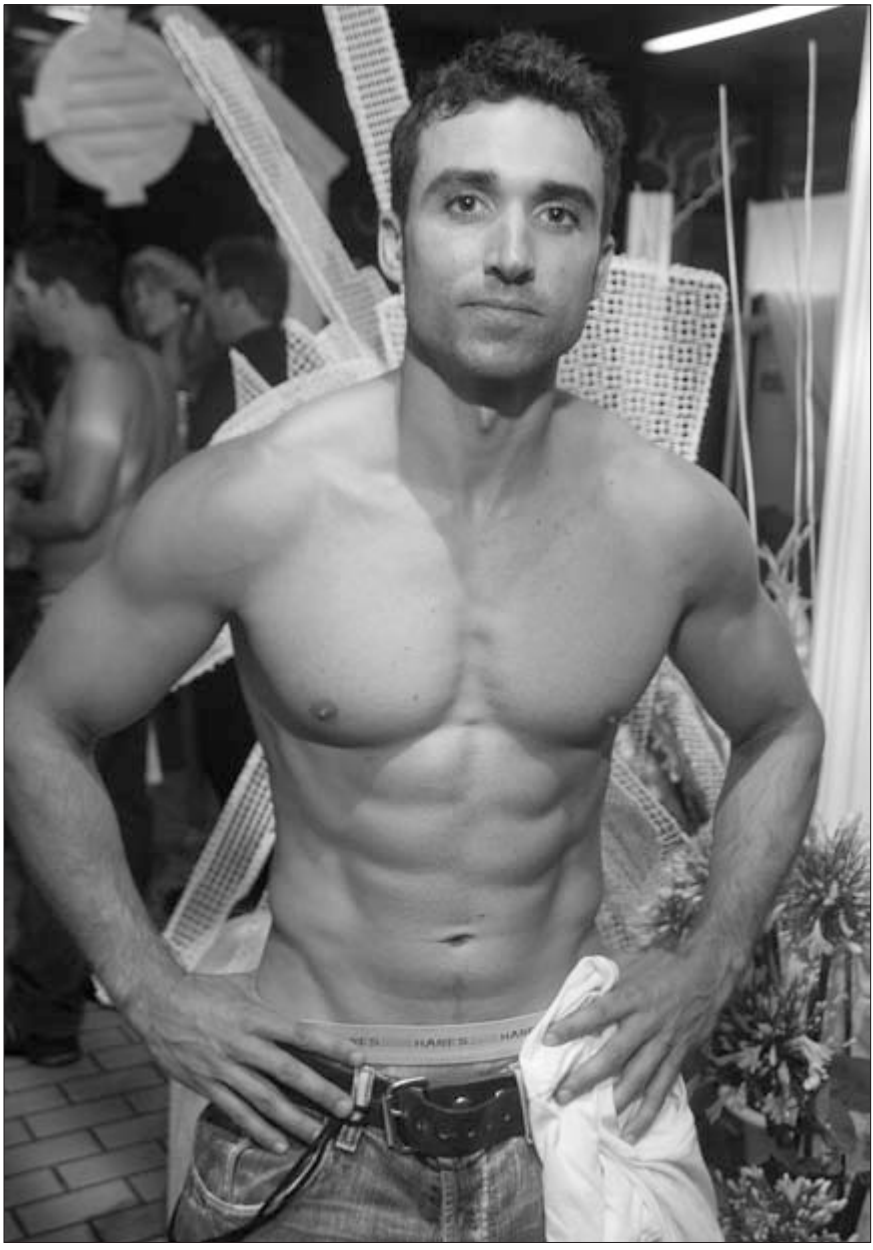
4. Judith Butler says that gender is "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (*Gender Trouble* 43–44). Speaking for myself, the fact that masculinity is a coded performance that is intrinsically a lie does not lessen its erotic appeal. The casual display of "natural" masculinity, as artificial as I know it is in reality, is extremely attractive to me. I find my infatuation with the masculine absurd, disturbing, amusing, and educational.
5. Many men see a muscular woman as a threat to their own masculinity. In interviews with female bodybuilders, Maria Lowe says, "Most [female] bodybuilders gave examples of strangers making unsolicited remarks about their physiques, some of which were imbued with threats of physical violence" (44). Bias against them is also present in competition: "Many in the sport, particularly officials and



Lynn McStatts, www.personalpaparazziatl.com

The typical look of a male participant in a Circuit party, T-shirt tucked partially into jeans, weekend pass (on cord) looped through belt loop, pants riding low on hips, and briefs, never boxers, for underwear (if underwear is worn), showing waistband and brand name. Pensacola Abracadabra Party on Memorial Day Weekend

In the modern West, the muscular male body began to be celebrated and marketed as the masculine ideal for the masses in the mid-nineteenth century (Budd xi). At the end of the nineteenth century, it had its first superstar, Eugen Sandow. Famous for both his physique and his strength, Sandow promoted what was called "physical culture" and linked his own regimen to athletic and military training (Budd 37–44).

Physical culture usually emphasized proper diet, exercise, and sexual/drug abstinence (sometimes including medicinal drugs) for building a sound body and mind. From this movement came magazines dedicated to both male and female physiques. Magazines with pictures of musclemen were favorites of homosexual men, who could mask the erotic appeal of scantily clad muscular male bodies behind chaste and publicly acceptable admiration for the bodybuilder, akin to hero worship of a sports figure. Nevertheless, physical culture magazines were often considered pornographic, and post office officials sought to ban them (Nealon 102).

Traditionally, a big-muscled man is assumed to be more powerful because of the obvious relationship between muscle and physical strength. But this relationship is just one side of the power coin, the other being the relationship between muscle and beauty. A muscular man is also seen as more beautiful.[6] Two connotations of power exist in muscle: the power to repel and punish (violence), and the power to attract and give pleasure (beauty). These connotations tend to be gendered according to the viewer. Roughly speaking, men are supposed to *respect* a muscular man, while women should *desire* him. The Gay male community undermines this distinction by openly celebrating the homoerotic beauty of the muscular male body and mocking the physically aggressive side of the muscular man by giving him soft or feminine nicknames, such as *gym bunny*, *muscle queen*, or *muscle mary*.

True to its Gay folk roots, the Circuit community promotes a fierce masculine ideal of the muscular man without the connotation of violence. This is how it goes: a muscular man who does not behave violently focuses attention instead on his body's beauty. He could become violent if he so chooses but does not because that would make him less attractive. This renders the appearance of physical strength to the status of *accessory*, like a nice pair of shoes.[7] By accessorizing muscles,

judges, consider it extremely inappropriate for women to take steroids [as opposed to men taking steroids] because they become too muscular and thus less feminine, whereas in male bodybuilders muscularity and masculinity are seen as compatible" (Lowe 75).

6. Muscle in men is a marker of beauty in Western discourse. The overabundance of muscle out of proportion to the body, however, needs not be seen as beautiful.

7. The most fascinating aspect of Stonewall is that violence was initiated to alert the police and the city authorities that the Gay community did indeed have "muscle"

the Circuit community trivializes their utilitarian features. The importance of the muscular body as a means for lifting heavy objects or fighting is made secondary to stimulating the admiration and sexual desire of others.

Outside of the Gay community, most men will rarely say that another man's body is beautiful because such a statement changes the body from an object of respect to an object of desire. These same men will have no problem saying that a car, dog, or baby is beautiful, which gives us some indication of how deeply ingrained homophobia is for many Straight men.

Homophobia is not synonymous with hatred of homosexuals. In "Masculinity as Homophobia," Michael Kimmel says,

> This, then is the great secret of American manhood: We fear other men. Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood. Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we may be perceived as gay men.… Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. (35)

Straight men are taught to deal with their fear of each other by indulging an obsession with violence that establishes their identities as real men who deserve respect. As Kimmel states, "Violence is often the most single evident marker of manhood" (35), even if most men are rarely violent in their day-to-day lives. The love of violent sports, violent videogames, violent movies, violent music, and violent speech are signs of a man's investment in manliness. Obsession with violence also serves as a veiled warning to other men; it implies the willingness to engage in violent behavior if provoked.[8]

When Gay men come out of the closet, much of the culture of masculine violence may lose its charm, if it ever appealed to them in the first place. Same-sex desire and/or feminine gender orientation may subvert that facet of Straight masculine identity at a very early age. Since Gay men openly eroticize masculine power in its embodied form as muscle, the powerful male body is first a source of pleasure instead of violence, even when it is recognized as a weapon of destruction. Sexual desire for muscle trumps fear of it.

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but would only use it when sorely provoked. It was a necessary accessory, so to speak, donned so that the message of Gay pride would be taken seriously. Unlike other riots, there was never any deep-seated hatred of a target group by the insurgents. There was no call issued for the death of anyone, and no one was killed.

8. There are always exceptions to the rule: Straight men who are not the least bit attracted to violence, and Gay men who cuss a lot, love contact sports, and get into fights.

When fear and violence associated with masculinity are reduced, established power dynamics of masculine over feminine associated with sexual penetration are wide open to subversion and reinterpretation. According to R. W. Connell, Gay relationships are marked by their reciprocity. Sex and its inherent roles for masculine dominance and feminine submission are less rigidly constructed for Gays than for Straights (162). Either person in a Gay relationship can be the penetrator (in popular Gay male speech, the "top"), and there is little stigma attached to the receptive partner behaving in a sexually aggressive manner during love-play (what members of the Gay community call an "aggressive" or "power bottom"). In the ultra-sensual, excessive, and transgressive world of the Circuit, the muscular male body is understood to be active, attractive, and masculine in both penetrator and penetrated sexual roles, even more so than in the larger Gay male community.

In terms of wordplay, Straight male discourse concerning sex-as-violence does not enjoy the same currency among Gay men, at least in public.[9] The notion of "fucking" another man, either physically or as an insult such as "Fuck you!" is not as degrading and does not trigger the same demand for violent response that informs Straight masculine social dynamics. In addition, since sex-based obscenities are often used as precursors for violent behavior, using such words is seen as ugly, not masculine, behavior. Take into account the perception among Circuiteers of the violent man as unattractive, and the result is that there is not much swearing at Circuit parties. When "Suck my dick" is an invitation, it loses much of its power as an insult.

Men, not women, are the preferred objects of desire in the Circuit, and the dynamics of sexual competition are radically different from heteronormative standards. Rather than being in competition *against* each other, men are in competition *for* each other. The need for a violent response toward a rival is tempered by the fact that he is potentially an object of desire as well. The Circuit, with its acceptance of casual physical contact on the dance floor, reduces violence even further.

Straight women who attend Circuit events express relief at being able to enjoy the pleasures of dancing close with well-groomed men without the hassle of cheap come-ons and the dreaded potential for unwanted groping. Public harassment of women is often part of the performance of Straight, not Gay, masculinity. Like homophobia, harassment of women is done for the benefit of other Straight men,

9. In the privacy of the bedroom, the dungeon (a sex room, usually with a sling, bondage equipment, and sex toys), or among ultra-masculine Leathermen, however, violent sex-language may be considered erotically stimulating.

who downplay their fear of each other by setting up a common enemy in the so-called battle of the sexes.[10]

This is not to say, however, that lack of violence means that there is no aggressive behavior in the Circuit. As Lionel Tiger notes, violence is a type of aggression; it is not synonymous with aggression (158). Masculinity for both Straight and Gay men is based upon vanity and dominance. Aggression sometimes arises in expressions of disdain from "hot" men for those who are not as physically beautiful.[11]

The dance floor is an exhibition space, a highly competitive arena for the display of the body and the performance of self for all to see. This leads to a preoccupation with being seen only with those who are attractive enough to merit one's attention. Selective male bonding with only the right kind of men leads to aggressive behavior toward those who do not make the grade. Tiger observes that male bonding goes hand-in-hand with male aggression (190), and the Circuit provides evidence that this phenomenon is not limited to Straight men. Occasionally, nasty misogynist echoes from the Straight world can be heard, not against women, but against non-muscular effeminate men and drag queens who do not embody the perceived Circuit ideal.[12] At its worst, the Circuit can be an ego-crushing snub-fest when body fascism takes over.

Body fascism in the Circuit reached its peak with MBHB (Miami Beach Hard Bodies), a group dedicated to having private orgies during Circuit party weekends that were restricted to only a select few. This series of carnal gatherings was held in hotel rooms and private

10. Michael Kaufman says, "boys [who were harassing girls] weren't doing it primarily to have an impact on the girls. They were doing it for the other boys. They were proving to the other boys and, presumably, to themselves, that they were real men" (220). Compare this with Maria Lowe on mistreatment of female bodybuilders: "Most of those [men] who felt compelled to make negative comments about the women's muscular physiques were men in groups while the female was by herself" (44). Muscular Gay men must occasionally bear the same group taunts and threats when they, as couples, "threaten" Straight men by holding hands or kissing in public.

11. Alan M. Klein speaks of the vanity of bodybuilders: "It is true the narcissist craves attention. He or she thirsts for admiration, but, ironically, tends to disdain those who give it" (206). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Circuit in its not-so-stellar moments.

12. Folklorist Joseph Goodwin states, "A reluctance to accept female impersonators and flaming queens is also common in the [Gay] subculture, since many gays feel that such people are 'politically incorrect,' reinforcing straights' stereotypes of gays and thereby hindering the cause of liberation" (61). This is true in the Circuit as well, since some of the muscular Circuit boys see themselves as the antithesis of the "faggy" stereotype. Nevertheless, most Circuit weekends will have at least one performance by quasi-drag performance artists and drag queens. Besides, muscularity does not guarantee masculine bearing. Some of the biggest muscle men in the Circuit can be quite nelly at times.

residences. Certain men chosen for their physical beauty received invitations. There was a bouncer-of-sorts at the door, screening potential hard bodies before they were allowed entry after paying a cover charge. At one point, clothing with the "MBHB" logo and MBHB business cards appeared at Circuit events, creating a clique within the already cliquish Circuit milieu.[13]

Absence of violence does not necessarily include the absence of racism and subtle forms of aggression and alienation that come with it. Body fascism tends to have a racist edge—not all muscular bodies are equal. The White man's body is privileged, although some leeway is given to the light-brown Latino body if it is not too far from the White ideal. American popular culture, as Richard Dryer notes, "constructs the white man as physically superior, yet also an everyman" (269). The muscular White male body (especially the front of the torso) is the most common icon in advertisements for Circuit events. When people of color are shown, they are usually among White models, and rarely is a non-White model the central figure.[14]

There is an inherent contradiction in the White ideal. As a race, White is preferable. But as a color, white is seen as sickly, especially at outdoor events. Melanin content in skin notwithstanding, it can be a greater challenge for men of color to feel accepted, especially as desirable bodies.[15]

On the other hand, body fascism undermines discrimination based solely on age. Since muscle is the marker for both masculinity and physical beauty, an older muscular or physically fit man (popularly known as a "daddy") is a legitimate object of desire regardless of age. The appreciation for a shaved head or a crew cut in the Gay community also helps older men significantly.

Sensual over Sexual

José Torrealba, director of the Circuit documentary *Got 2 B There*, describes the Circuit as a place where Gay men can touch each other without having sex (interview, October 2000).[16] In order to understand

13. MBHB died out at the beginning of the new millennium.
14. Racially-inclusive advertisements have been produced by Circuit parties that are situated in week-long community festivals, such as Miami Winter Party and Montreal Black and Blue.
15. This may change in the very near future, however. The demographics of the Circuit population are shifting with the increasing patronage of non-European Latinos and Asian Americans. I predict that there will eventually be a broadening in the perception of the masculine ideal. Nevertheless, I do not see any change concerning the privileging of the physically fit body.
16. In 1999, José Torrealba produced *Got 2 B There*, a documentary on the Circuit in which he interviewed DJs, producers, activists, scholars, participants, and critics of the Circuit.

this statement, one must realize that the Gay community is tolerant of behaviors that the general public would consider excessive, especially sexual behaviors. Since sex is such a casual part of Gay male life, it would seem a paradox that the Circuit, a gathering of shirtless, intoxicated, flirty men, would not degenerate into one big orgy on the dance floor.

One reason it does not is the abundant number of Gay male venues that cater to orgiastic gatherings. David Nimmons states that "[Gay men] have arguably the most complex, flourishing, nuanced sexual culture the planet has ever known. No other population alive today enjoys a sexual milieu so elaborated and robust, so richly creative, as ours" (81). Most Gay communities have bathhouses, sex clubs, and back rooms (spaces for sex in clubs) for this purpose, places that many Gay men avoid because those venues are *too* blatantly sexual.

Sexual irresponsibility associated with drugs in the Gay community is far from being limited to the Circuit. The PNP (Party 'n' Play) community uses the Internet to hook up, do drugs, and have sex, completely bypassing the club and Circuit scenes. Scott Van Tussenbrook, writer for *Circuit Noize*, describes PNP:

> A whole lexicon of terms has grown up around this "scene," and most seem to downplay what's happening or at least avoid using scary words. "Chem friendly" in somebody's profile is a nice way of saying "drug user." But spend any time with these guys and you find that "chem friendly" really means, "I can't have sex without crystal [methamphetamine]." The whole thing is so out of control they might as well cut to the chase. "Looking to party n play. U?" as an opening line might as well be, "I've bumped [snorted drugs] myself silly. Why don't you come over here and just drive your car up my ass?" (personal communication, August 2003)

Circuit parties, even notoriously sexual ones like the New York City Black Party (which features live sex shows and a big, dark back room for group sex), are primarily about the pleasures of dance. Sexual activity is, for the most part, restricted to things that men can do with their pants on while moving to the beat, and intoxicant use is most commonly restricted to the enhancement of dance-floor pleasures, not as an end in itself. Overintoxication leads to the reduction of those pleasures and the tragic[17] possibility of looking like a buffoon.

The Circuit generates a different range of pleasures as intoxication and sex become secondary to the experience of transcendent solidarity, which is an intimate and communal phenomenon. Orgies, on the

17. "Tragic" is an emic term for something that is terribly unstylish. It is the opposite of fierce.

other hand, are rather impersonal affairs, almost mechanical in preparation and execution. Gaiety is not the hallmark of bathhouses and sex clubs, which typically feature somber-faced men who prowl around with grim intensity, much like the Vatican. The aesthetics of an orgy tend to be limited to those things that can accommodate the immediate craving for the sexual over anything else. The Circuit involves many more pleasures and levels of social interaction than the raw expression of orgasmic heat. Sexiness in the Circuit takes on new dimensions of discipline for a dancing body not found in a stationary body or a rutting body. While close dancing is highly erotic, the beat of the music and the critical gaze of others regulate it. Since the Circuit happens in public space, a discipline-deficient body that obeys its own sexual rhythm is not fierce. It appears disjointed, out of sync with the communal flow, and basically silly.

One important factor that keeps affairs sensual rather than sexual is a collective sense of public propriety. Attractiveness is a most desirable quality; anything that reduces one's beauty is to be studiously avoided. Lack of control is not attractive. Although many participants feel the need to drink alcohol or do recreational drugs before they feel comfortable enough to dance and be sensual, being overly intoxicated or sexual can cost one status on the dance floor. Not everything goes.

Rules dictating that committed couples only dance sensuously with each other, however, are not part of Circuit ethics. Boundaries that set couples in committed relationships apart from swinging singles (and other couples) are lowered to a degree that would be scandalous to those outside of the Circuit/Leather scene, even by Gay male conventional standards. The need to mark, survey, and protect one's sexual property is relaxed. Men involved in serious relationships can dance with other men quite intimately and still consider themselves monogamous. This in turn reduces the need for hyper-masculine displays of violence in defense of one's honor.

Couples just entering the Circuit scene may find themselves both enthusiastic and anxiety-ridden about the prospect of engaging in public displays of sensuality with other men. They may set elaborate rules concerning who may dance with whom and in what fashion until the couple becomes comfortable with the scene and with themselves. Many people in the Circuit community consider the acceptance of casual dance floor contact to be a healthy expression of sexuality that can strengthen, not weaken, the bonds of commitment.

The relaxation of rules concerning sexual property is something that occurs in Gay male society in general but is more pronounced in the Circuit. Michael Warner describes the intricate Gay male social-sexual network:

> Try standing at a party of queer friends and charting the histories, sexual and nonsexual, among the people in the room. You will realize that only a fine and rapidly shifting line separates sexual culture from many other relations of durability and care. The impoverished vocabulary of Straight culture tells us that people should be either husbands and wives or (nonsexual) friends. Marriage marks the line. It is not the way many queers live. If there is such a thing as a gay way of life, it consists in these relations, a welter of intimacies outside of the framework of professions and institutions and ordinary social obligations. (Trouble 116)

Monogamy for Gay men often does not include total sexual exclusivity. Most couples, in fact, do not expect it. Nimmons says,

> When a clear majority of stable, successful long-term gay couples redraw the rules to include outside sex, and still about a quarter don't, it says that we have *clearly elaborated a parallel set of acceptable cultural norms* [italics in the original]. It seems that the natives of these lavender provinces are not so much cheating as choosing. (85)

Proof of this can be seen in the abundance of boyfriends and happily married men who attend Circuit parties with their partners. I have met "Circuit couples" that have been together twenty years or longer.

The biggest reason that sensual dancing is preferred over sexual acts is, interestingly enough, pleasure. Overtly sexual expression tends to isolate those who engage in it, which undermines the rich pleasures associated with communal solidarity.

Sue Katz wrote about the superiority of sensuality to sex as a technique for fostering community:

> Sensuality is something that can be very collective. Sex is private and tense. Sensuality is something you want your best friends to feel and act on with your other best friends. Sex is something you want power and territorial rights over. Sex is limited to the pants and limited by that. Sensuality is all over and grows always. (Teal 286)

Katz's words reveal the dynamics around a powerful force that binds the Circuit community. Make no mistake; the sensual does not completely eliminate the sexual at Circuit parties, but it does tend to postpone sex until after the dance. The sensual playfully aggravates the sexual by evoking it without allowing it free rein. The combination of sensuality and dance can be wonderfully erotic because it approaches but does not actualize the sexual act.

Erotic sensations thrive on the border of the forbidden. Dancing sensually with another man, but not allowing the dance to become

full-fledged sex, can be highly arousing precisely because the dancers approach an erotic barrier that is tested but not shattered. Disciplining the sex drive, forcing one's movements (and one's partner) to conform to the beat, feeling the intensity of the music and physical union with it, the exhibitionistic charge that comes with aesthetically expressing sexual heat in public without actually resorting to sex—all of these are part of the performance of masculinity as it is danced in the Circuit.

I remember a friend of mine describing an incident when his newfound love wanted him to leave the dance floor and go back to his hotel room for sex. His response was, "And quit dancing? You must be out of your mind!"[18]

Solidarity

Whether culturally learned or biologically hard-wired, there are some pleasures that men can only feel when they bond with other men. This includes the deep social pleasure of feeling like "one of the boys." Most of the sports industry, bar culture, rioting mobs, terrorist cells, firefighters, lifeguards, police, and the military depend on consistent production of this pleasure in order to function.

To be sure, views of male bonding differ in Straight and Gay worlds. Masculine solidarity in the Circuit takes on certain characteristics that differentiate it from other kinds of male bonding.

People do not go to large public gatherings simply to see a game, watch a movie, hear music, or listen to an evangelist. A large part of the pleasure that drives these events is the experience of coming together in massive numbers. Because of ingrained distrust of strangers and respect for the personal space of other people, however, participants need a reason (an excuse, really) for these gatherings to take place. Typically, that reason is to join an audience that witnesses a performance together.

Riots and uprisings, on the other hand, undermine the audience/performer distinction. In the zone of conflict, the stage of performance is not fixed. Performance may all too easily incorporate witnesses, whether they choose to participate or not. The participants (rioters, law enforcement, and innocent bystanders) are the stars. The relaxation of propriety between the rioters, police, and their respective targets can be exhilarating for aggressors on whatever side.

Participating in undisciplined communal violence leads to great pleasures; not the least is a feeling of collective belonging, often with strong spiritual implications. A profound sense of freedom and manliness can accompany the willingness to suffer for a cause and the

18. I have heard variations of this story from several participants.

conscious rejection of ethical rules against harming others. The rationale for tremendous damage is often based upon a higher morality: those who have suffered (or are willing to suffer) have earned the right to inflict suffering.

This is apparent when one looks at sports riots. The driving ethos behind being a fan is faithfulness to one's team, even when it loses. Victory signals vindication of one's devotion. In contact sports (i.e., sports that involve physical violence), male fans may choose to imitate the beloved team and establish their dominance as aggressively active and violent agents rather than passive and peaceful fans by rioting when their beloved team wins, which is justified because of the myth of suffering and humility that they have endured. The sacrifices of their team, coupled with the resurrection of the team once it achieves victory, fuels the performance of violent masculinity as fans assert to the universe, their opponents, and law enforcement, "We're number one!" Military, terrorist, and religious ritual that involves the execution of fellow humans contains that same masculine language of sacrifice, resurrection, and dominance.

I call this form of male bonding *punitive solidarity*. It is the basis for the thrill felt by participants, and vicariously by the fans, of martial arts, boxing, most team sports, and war. Punitive solidarity has also inspired atrocities throughout history, including the First Crusade, the destruction of the World Trade Center, Wounded Knee, Nazi concentration camps, Stalinist purges, Rwandan/Cambodian massacres, and torture in Abu Ghraib/Guantanamo.[19] The pure, undisciplined ethics of domination as the ultimate defense runs strong in the human psyche, and it can sweep away all other ethical concerns.

Let me situate this argument in the context of my own nationality. As popular movies and sports repeatedly demonstrate, we as Americans are addicted to the violent and subversive pleasures of punitive solidarity. Occasionally we express repugnance, and we may act as if we are peace loving, but our very language betrays us. We use the language of war and armed conflict for all kinds of things in order to rally popular support. We have declared war on terrorism, drugs, cancer, and disco. Our political parties are comfortable with declaring war on each other, even to the point of calling the money they raise for their political campaigns a "war chest." We describe the romantic relationship between men and women as "the battle of the sexes." Rarely do we question

19. In my hometown of Columbus, Ohio, I observed punitive solidarity when I worked as a bouncer in a campus bar, especially during football season. Punitive solidarity was elevated to an art form when, in 2002, Ohio State fans did more than the usual dumpster-burning and car-overturning; they worked as a team to stack cars on top of one another and then set the cars on fire.

the ethics of such language, or the fact that we allow our children to read and watch stories in which thousands, millions, even billions of people die. We only mourn the casualties on one side of the conflict in tales such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Star Wars*, stories where the righteous warrior is sanctified and made holy through sacrifice and the wholesale slaughter of the "bad guys."

The overwhelming majority of combatants in the world, be they rioters, warriors, or athletes, are men. Profound pleasures, at times ecstatic, come with male bonding through punitive solidarity. If Kimmel is correct when he says that Straight men's relationships with each other are based on fear, membership in a team allows men to let down their guards around fellow combatants who fight for each other rather than against each other, invoking deep-seated and pleasurable emotions associated with loyalty, affection, and trust.

But combatants cannot bond together by themselves. If masculine identity is premised upon fear and violence, then the barriers between Straight men can only fall when they agree to collectively project their fear and violence onto outsiders. They are dependent on their targets, real and imagined, for team identity. *We* are defined by *them*.[20]

Communal dances, like riots, are events in which the crowd is the show. The line between spectator and performer is undermined significantly. Unlike riots, most communal dance is not dependent upon a despised "other" for participant identity. This does not mean that there is no competition. In many heterosexual dance settings, competition is easily observable, particularly between men from different cliques that affirm their bonds in bars by throwing their weight around. Although officially forbidden, popular rules for undisciplined behavior regarding Straight masculinity and intoxication regularly result in violence. Attempts to limit male violence through dress codes (no sports caps or athletic wear that link men's egos to larger teams, no tank tops for the aggressive display of muscle-as-weapon, no gang insignia) are futile. They cannot eliminate what passes for *natural* masculine behavior.

Communal dance in the Circuit has rules for masculinity and intoxication that do not naturalize violent behavior. There is a sense of security; the Circuit is a safe space for Gay men to flirt and dance with each other with no fear of violent reprisal from Straight men. But Circuit identity is not defined in contrast with what Gay men perceive as the

20. I think it is probable that, in many cases, the covert function of riots is to incite both rioters and law enforcement into using each other for greater displays of punitive solidarity. This is done by aggravating the opposite side to engage in more serious transgressions by inflicting violence or the threat of it, thus increasing the pleasures of bonding that come with manly self-defense.

immorality and violence of their Straight oppressors.[21] In an interview with DJ Tom McBride, I asked him what the difference was between the solidarity of the Circuit and the solidarity of the Nuremberg rallies of Nazi Germany. He said that, unlike Nazi Germany, the Circuit is not unified against anyone. "There is no us against them," he said, "only us" (June 2001). The result is a crowd whose major competitive goal is favorable attention from as many people as possible. There is no need for a dress code for the purpose of limiting male violence, either at the typical Gay dance venue or at Circuit parties.

Gay male sensibilities admire the expressive male body-in-motion for its beauty rather than its functionality. Seymour Kleinman sums up the prevalent Straight male understanding of the masculine body:

> It appears that in our pursuit of and subservience to game and sport, the body almost acts as an obstacle which must be overcome. The body and its movement is viewed as the means to attain the ends of a game. We seek neither significance nor meaning to human movement. (123)

In the heteronormative worldview, the athletic body appears to reinforce the value of dominance rather than solidarity because it is typically described as a utility, even a machine, for victory over other men.[22] This does not mean that admiration is absent from Straight male sensibilities; watching the athletic male body in action or the bodybuilder posing in competition gives the Straight male observer the excuse to admire it. The Gay male gaze, however, does not need this excuse, at least not in a Gay-friendly setting. Gay men give themselves permission to look at a man's body as much more than just a competitive machine.

Nevertheless, few Gay men are raised Gay. Many men, regardless of sexual orientation, suffer from the cultural notion (notorious among White Americans) that the only appropriate time for a man to dance is when he is *three sheets to the wind* or *higher than God*. Add to these insecurities the highly intimidating environment of the Circuit and it is no surprise that intoxicants play such an important role.

Alcohol is not the only intoxicant of choice in the Circuit. As people drink alcoholic beverages, they become clumsy. DJ Jeremy James

21. Goodwin says, "When gays use their folklore to cope with such pressures [tension caused by straight oppression], it serves to invalidate the straight world. In doing so, it validates the gay culture. It is this defiance that is the essence of much gay folklore" (63). The Circuit, however, carries on without demonizing or even lampooning Straight culture as much as it simply ignores it for the weekend.
22. Susan Hatty states that "Organized sports generally involves spectacular contests, in which fit and muscular bodies are pitted against each other. Such contact between bodies is inherently physical; however, it is often violent. [It involves] the hardening of the body into a potential instrument of harm" (126).

(Columbus) told me, "You can have 2000 crackers[23] in the room and nobody bumps into each other. Throw in two beer drinkers and they bounce around like pinballs!" (personal communication, May 2006).

The culture of alcohol that we have in this country encourages men to flex their "beer muscles." It allows them to feel, in folk terms, *ten feet tall and bulletproof*, thus drastically lowering the threshold for acceptable violence. If the chances of accidentally bumping into other people are increased with drunkenness, and if the drunkards feel ten feet tall and bulletproof, there tends to be more social friction. By itself, alcohol also gets in the way of skillful dancing.

There are other substances that retard motor skills less severely than alcohol,[24] make the imbiber feel sexy and full of energy, and do not make the user's breath stink. For these reasons, MDMA (a.k.a. ecstasy) is a preferred intoxicant of Circuit participants.[25] The sense of communal empathy (characterized as *tribal*), internal spiritual integration, relaxation of personal space barriers, infusion of vigor, intensification of music, and sheer physical joy of dancing while doing ecstasy are important factors that define masculinity in the Circuit and Rave scenes.

Intoxicant use in the Circuit differs from the typical bar scene because club drugs in the Circuit community are not simply means for putting oneself into a stupor. All are dance-enhancing if used properly. They allow a degree of heightened social, sensual, kinesthetic, and cognitive awareness. This is why heroin is virtually unknown; heroin severely undermines one's ability to move with grace. Communal identity tempers obsession with personal pleasure. This balance of pleasure and propriety is crucial to experiences of cosmic transcendence because other people on the dance floor are kinfolk whose opinions and happiness matter.

Fierce Solidarity

During the long dance sessions that typify a Circuit event, there are periods in which the DJ bonds with the crowd and unifies it in transcendent solidarity. It is the breaking down of status between participants who share a state of such intense emotional affection that, as a unified *corpus*, they step outside of the everyday world together. These periods become self-validating and ethically charged in their own right.

23. "Crackers" is shorthand for "crack whores," slang for those who use illegal substances.
24. These substances are frequently used in conjunction with alcohol, often resulting in less severe physical impairment.
25. There was a shift to crystal methamphetamine over MDMA in some circles, possibly because crystal is so readily available and easily produced. Some participants (and many DJs) complain that the prevalence of crystal has led to a more aggressive crowd. This trend seems to have run its course.

History is rewritten; everything appears to have but one purpose: to create this moment, this experience of transcendent solidarity. It can happen in any number of settings with people in large numbers. A sports contest, religious revival, battlefield, and dramatic performance are also common venues for transcendent solidarity. It is also the goal of most seasonal festivals and basic training for soldiers, and it resembles the state of grace awaiting people when they meet their loved ones in Heaven.

Transcendent solidarity in the Circuit, however, has its own distinct flavor. It is not punitive or confrontational. Something different happens when a Gay man immerses himself in the pulsing mass of his fellows on the dance floor. It is not the same as the unity felt at a Pride parade, when LGBTQ people show the outside world who they are. Safe within the protected zone of a Circuit party, participants may discover themselves as individual persons and as a people who live in a universe that loves them, a fact that they may have missed in their upbringing. It is a *socio-somatic* discovery, one that is experienced in the context of the individual body-mind that, through close contact and synchronized movement with other people, merges into a unified communal body-mind. Factors such as trust, rhythm, and humor are essential in its production. In order to differentiate the transcendent solidarity of the Circuit from that of combatants (punitive solidarity) and the Peace-Love-Unity-Respect ethos of Ravers (PLUR solidarity), I include Circuit term that reflects assertiveness, humor, and outrageousness: *fierce solidarity*.

Circuiteers often have plenty to say about the spiritual aspects of fierce solidarity and its manifestation on the dance floor. Chris Davis, a Manhattanite by way of Louisiana, says,

> As in church, the DJ sets the tone, just as a minister does. In church, you are surrounded by other congregants seeking the same bit of solace and inspiration. In church, when everyone is in agreement with the energy in the building and the choir is singing and the music is making your feet tap and your face starts to get flushed from the excitement of it all and everyone stands to their feet at the same time screaming Hallelujah!—that's the same as being on the dance floor when everyone recognizes the hit of the moment and everyone's hands lift to the sky in praise. It's all worship and praise, just in different buildings with different ministers, be they ministers of sound or religion. (personal communication, July 2007)

New York journalist Steve Weinstein is a bit more critical about the notion of a collective Circuit spirituality (although he does admit to having "disco epiphanies" on the dance floor). When asked about the moment when the DJ bonds with the crowd, he is almost poetic:

> Spiritual? In a sense, I guess, yes. When everyone connects, there's a sense of being home. All of us together—there's a comfort level, being comfortable and cozy among thousands of strangers. (personal communication, July 2007)

DJ Paulo (Paulo Gois) confirms the existence of Circuit spirituality:

> Yes, I have experienced this myself. That total escape from the world, the "oneness" with the music, a vocal track lifting you above the floor, it can be very spiritual. Unfortunately, a lot of things have happened, including the use of crystal meth, which can take away from that ability to connect with the music. (Weems, "Serious Fun" 22)

From my own experiences on the dance floor, I can do things that are physically impossible for me to do, once the music hits me. But the conditions must be just right—the song has to be placed just right in the DJ's set, the crowd must be totally in sync, the collective energy must be sufficiently intense, and I must be swept into the communal merging, the transcendent solidarity of the moment. At such moments, dance movements that I could never perform without access to the collective energy seem to magically come forth without effort. I enter into a state of ecstasy, that is, I stand outside of myself and watch my own performance, often observing with amusement that I seem to have only partial control over what I will do next. It is the nearest thing in my lived experience to the trance-dance performed by mediums transformed into Gods in Candomblé as they move to sacred songs and sanctified drums, or to the state of grace enjoyed by born-again Christians when the music and rhythm of a Spirit-filled Gospel choir summons forth the holy dance from within their souls to flood, overpower, and then sanctify their body-minds.[26]

The Circuit crowd in the throes of ecstasy is situated in a distinctly Gay male environment that encompasses the participants without making them disappear into a faceless collective. According to event producer Jeffrey Sanker, participants are *empowered* (interview, September 2007), and this empowerment can inspire them to rise above their own limitations.

People behave both as individuals and as one physical mass that acts like a single pulsing being, which is often described as a *sea of men*. Within that sea, a collective self regulates the collective body.

26. Occasionally, Candomblé mediums and Spirit-filled Christians will do remarkable things bordering on the impossible when in a beatific state. Although I cannot claim to have done anything more extreme than dance with better coordination and expression than usual, there seems to be a connection between personal excellence, superb performance, and transcendence in Africanized religious and secular Circuit frames.

Mark and Robert/MRNY

Box dancer, DC Cherry Party 2008

This self-disciplined identity determines the level of physical contact between individuals and tells participants what kinds of interactions are appropriate.

As the community bonds, people relax and drop their guards. Giving in to their collective identity as well as expressing themselves individually, people swim with the prevailing currents, adapting behaviors appropriate for that moment. Rules for physical contact crystallize, dissolve, and reconfigure as the collective mood changes, sending ripples through the sea-crowd during the course of the evening. If the bonding is pronounced, displays of affection, smiles, and physical contact increase. However, this can change very quickly; a short time later, participants may return to more conservative and guarded rules of interpersonal engagement.

Regardless of whether the sea is calm or turbulent, a high level of trust between strangers develops and is rarely undermined—I have yet to hear of anyone having a wallet stolen at a Circuit event. Sexual desire, intoxicants, and hilarity fuel the creation of this intense and short-term corps, and public propriety keeps people checking with the prevailing status quo that determines just how excessive and transgressive one can be without looking foolish.

Fierce solidarity regulates but does not eliminate individual expression. Within the performance space of the Circuit, individuals can remove themselves from the crowd and perform on a stage or raised platform. There are three standard performance genres for those who are removed from the masses yet still remain part of the event: box dancing, flagging, and performance artistry.

A prominent feature of Gay men's dance clubs is the democratization of the dance box. Originally intended for professional performers like go-go dancers,[27] boxes have become spaces that are open to anyone with enough nerve to dance upon them in front of everyone else.

The populist dimension of the dance box fits nicely with the basic democratic ethic of the Circuit, in which the dance floor is a grand stage on which the participants are the premier performers. But the dance floor is also a meritocracy. Not everyone will get the same reaction when stepping up on the box. The better the dancers' coordination, the greater the variety of moves, and the more energy that the dancers send out from the box can make a difference as to how the people below them will receive them. And, of course, a muscular body and good looks do not hurt.

Box dancers have the chance to feel the energy of the crowd as a whole, and to translate and amplify that energy. There are exhibitionistic pleasures to be had on the box, including a profound altered state that overcomes dancers when, in front of everyone, they *become* the music. This occurs when the dancer's body is no longer moving *to* the music, but is moved *by* it and then mystically merges *with* it. The dancer experiences a form of *ex stasis* in which the consciousness stands outside of the body and watches it work. The feeling is indescribably good. When this altered state happens on the box, the dancer may also merge with the crowd in a symbiotic relationship. The pleasure of the crowd witnessing the ecstasy of the dancer sends the dancer into even higher levels of pleasure. This type of ecstasy is best when it is shared. Should the dancer have the presence of mind to give that energy right back to the crowd, everyone benefits and the communal experience of transcendent solidarity is enhanced.

27. Go-go boys are hired for certain events, and, strictly speaking, are box dancers. Most go-go boys are also Circuit boys; they can blend seamlessly into the crowd once their dance shift is over.

Mark and Robert/MRNY

Flagger at DC Cherry 2008.

Box dancers sometimes dance in pairs. Occasionally, a couple will push the envelope and mimic sex acts to the pulse of the music, but usually with humor and only for a short time.

Flaggers wave large squares of cloth around themselves. They are a distinct tribe within the Circuit community. Many of them make their own flags, which are usually bright, colorful fabric weighted from corner to corner on one side with small metal pellets so that the cloths open up as they are waved. Flaggers learn their craft from more seasoned practitioners, thus continuing a tradition that goes back to the fan dancing performed in the early Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit of the 1970s.

Most flagging is solo performance that requires about ten times the space of the average dancer. Flaggers need the space in order not to hit others with their weighted flags (which can hurt), so they usually go on stage or on a box. Most of them are older than thirty-five, although there are plenty of younger enthusiasts among them.

Occasionally, there are conflicts between flaggers and box dancers. If there is only limited space, tensions can increase. Unlike most box dancers, flagging tends to be as introverted as it is exhibitionistic, a means for personal meditation as well as being visually interesting to observers. Some flaggers expect box dancers to get out of their way. On the other hand, box dancers may feel wronged by a flagger who takes up the space of multiple box dancers on hotly contested performance real estate. If the flagger performs at the edge of a box or stage, the "danger zone" for other participants includes a few feet in front of them, thus becoming an imposition on the dance-floor crowd.

Most flaggers, however, are conscious of the feelings of others. They only unfurl their flags when there is enough room without imposing on anyone. Some events will set aside areas specifically for flaggers. The best of the flagging tribe will welcome box dancers and share space with them, even incorporating them into the flagging performance with quite beautiful results. A skilled flagger can bathe a dancer with the soft, flowing fabric when the two move in synchronized harmony.

As mentioned earlier, flagging may carry spiritual significance for the flagger. The fluid motions of flag dancing, the softness of the fabric as it caresses the skin, and the interplay of light, music, and movement create a distinctly different sensual vibration than that enjoyed by the box dancer or participants on the dance floor. Part of that difference includes a significant reduction in sexual expression; one cannot engage in the usual Circuit boy shenanigans of multiple intertwining bodies pressed crotch-to-crotch-to-butt when one flags.

Another tradition to come out of Circuit culture is *performance artistry*, a rather vague term that usually refers to a peculiar incarnation

of drag that has roots in the highly competitive Ballroom scene. It is through performance artists that an important aspect of Ballroom fierceness, the affirmation of personal charisma through dance and dramatic presentation of self, makes its mark on Circuit fierceness.

The typical Circuit performance artist shaves his[28] head, incorporates elements of drag in his costumes, and lip-syncs current songs in the middle of Circuit parties. Performance artistry usually involves choreographed routines with well-muscled back-up dancers and dazzling props. Variations on performance artistry include traditional drag by Circuit Mom (Chicago), masculine shape-morphing of Rubio and Kidd (Miami), nelly non-drag camp of Alan T (Miami), and "tranny fierce" feminine perfection of transwoman Gia (Toronto).[29]

Performance artists are popular in the Circuit, a rather odd phenomenon considering that the usual focus of performance is on the dance floor, not the stage. Their appeal is due to several factors; performance artists get attention by sheer audacity. They flout the usual prerequisites for lots of muscle and butch masculine expression. The shaved head and dancer's physique present a hardened femininity that is fascinating to watch, especially when framed by an eye-catching costume. Every performance artist I have seen is a superb dancer who can grab the crowd and energize it with smooth, aggressive movements that resonate with the bodies of participants.

Regardless of whether they are sexually attracted to people of color, the vast majority of Circuiteers are attracted to Blackness. Performance artists evoke the admiration that Circuiteers have for the Black diva as a human being who will not be held down. Performance artists rarely interrupt the flow of the music. Their shows tend to be short, one-song performances of five to seven minutes which are mixed into the DJ's set without interfering with the flow of the music, changing the tempo, or talking to the audience.

Performance artist/DJ Power Infiniti gives some general rules for performance artistry:

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28. In this context, "performance artist" is a gender-Queer art form that does not include professional singers who are hired to perform during Circuit parties, the majority of whom are Straight Black women. I only know of a single female-born (a.k.a. "real girl") performance artist: Lena Love (Toronto), a woman who successfully markets herself as a drag queen.
29. I witnessed Gia perform during Toronto Prism. Her femininity was not lessened in the least by the male genitalia subtly apparent in her golden bikini. The crowd accepted her without ridicule; in fact, she was perceived as glamorous. Not wanting to offend her, I asked her if I could describe her as "tranny fierce"; she said, "Of course" (interview, July 2008). I know of no transmen who are performance artists (although porn star/transman Buck Angel did perform at the NYC Black Party 2006).

> Know your music and know your crowd. This leads to the next rule: flow. Know your DJ and what he/she is spinning and plan a show that will fit into their vibe. As a performer, you are an additive to the night, and unless your name is bigger than the DJ's, then the DJ should be the star. This does not apply to recording artists who are already stars. Your show should not break the energy of the night, of the DJ's groove, and of the crowd. The song should mix in and out of the DJ set seamlessly. And to set you apart, either break a fierce new song or give the crowd an oldie but goodie (one that brings back memories). Glamour girls, while good for pageants and small-town bars, will find it more difficult to appeal to the boys on the dance floor if they are not truly turning it [turning it out, performing well] on stage. None of that "stand and pose in a sequin gown" shit. (interview, January 2008)

Performance artists such as Kitty Meow, Power Infiniti, Flava, Rubio and Kidd, and Kevin Aviance have achieved legendary status within the Circuit community. They maintain a striking position as outsiders from the mainstream, insiders belonging with the select group of DJs and promoters who run the parties, and folk stars. They may also continue the Ballroom tradition of *Houses*, non-sanguinal familial connections and obligations with up-and-coming performers who trace their lineage to a particular performance artist.

The fondness for hilarity in the Circuit includes an appreciation for the often scandalous verbal wordplay of African American Gay men who regularly address each other as "girl" and "girlfriend," and use terms from the Ballroom scene such as *work*, *fierce*, *bitch*, *shade*, and *cunty*. In the context of the circuit, *work* refers to adroit performance. A *bitch* can be male or female, and is a term of endearment as well as insult. As mentioned earlier, *fierce* has no connotations of violence, just confidence and charisma. *Shade* is spiteful negativity. *Cunty* is not at all an insult meant to demean women when applied to either dance-floor demeanor or music. It is almost synonymous with fierce but with more of an edge. One word that is currently making its way into the Circuit community is *kiki*, to laugh and have fun with one's friends.

Some African American word usage, however, does not make it into the Circuit vocabulary. Gangsta terms are rarely used. There is much less use of obscenities-as-insult (and obscenities in general) in Circuit music lyrics than in the violence-oriented masculinity espoused in gangsta rap and the thug life. In the development of nonviolent Gay-oriented masculinity, the Circuit has failed to incorporate gangsta speech. Such overt references to violence are not considered fierce. [30]

30. Erikk Martin says fierceness is related to Blackness. But he does not feel that

Much of Black-influenced verbal performance of the Circuit is a way of making oneself a valued spectator, an audience that receives special attention. As such, verbal performance can gain a participant a lot of positive attention, the most sought-after commodity in the world of the Circuit. Off the dance floor, the same vocabulary serves to mark the speaker as a person who is in the know.

one has to be Black to be fierce, or at least not a Black man: "I don't think White Circuit boys want to be Black. But they all want to be Black women" (interview, July 2004).

Commentary: Power Infiniti

Miami
January 2008

I am a DJ/performer who has been lucky enough to have made a name for myself in the Gay Circuit scene. I am from Trinidad and Tobago in the West Indies, about seven miles off the coast of Venezuela. I was only born there, living the first five years of my life in New York, and growing up in Miami. I was kind of small for my age, but a good fighter nonetheless, hence the name Power, given by friends at around thirteen. It's the name that's stuck.

My Ballroom past was a huge preparation for my career as a Circuit performance artist. My connection with the Ballroom scene started a couple years after coming out, with me taking notice of the children of the House of Exxcentrica serving drama on the dance floor.

A ball thrown by diva Jo-Jo Infiniti[31] (who really opened up the Ballroom scene in Florida) was the first time I got to see underground talent up close. These kids were doing things that, if displayed on any stage at any Circuit party, would make the boys and girls of clubland gag [watch the performance in amazement]. I soon opened up my own House, the House of Righteous Shade, and went head-to-head in Ballroom competitions with other Florida Houses, like the House of Lords, House of Exxcentrica, and (at the time) our archrivals, the House of Infiniti.

After a few years, I wanted to make my mark on the club scene, including the Circuit. I left my House [and competition in the Ballroom scene] in '97. My friendship with Jo-Jo Infiniti, however, remained solid and as a result, I eventually became a member of the House of Infiniti; yes, the same House that once I had hated, I now embrace. I've been an Infiniti ever since, which is why my full name is Power Infiniti.

When a Ballroom competitor switches to the Circuit, the need for drama and shade is greatly reduced. The things the kids do for a Ballroom contest are so much more amazing than what we do during a Circuit performance because the Ballroom crowd is a tough crowd to please. If you want 10's across the board [approval from the judges and crowd], you'd better be able to turn it or you will get chopped [disqualified] and told to sit down.

Long before there was an official Circuit scene, there were performers that were using androgeny (i.e., shaved heads, semi-drag). Much respect has to be given to my sister Kitty Meow; though not alone in

31. Every person mentioned in Power Infiniti's commentary was born biologically male.

her styling (Kevin Aviance would also perform quite androgenous from time to time), she did in fact help to pioneer the Circuit scene. So I would have to say in the Circuit scene, it pretty much started with Kitty Meow.

However, the fact that I shaved my head and took on a similar look had less to do with influence and more to do with circumstance. I am Black, and I came into the scene with a shaved head before I knew Kitty. Coincidently, when Flava and I met for the first time, Flava had not really seen me. Her androgynous look was not influenced directly by me or the Circuit. Sometimes in this great big world of ours, birds of a feather truly do flock together, at least in terms of styling.

I have seen Flava perform many times. Love her; she is my sister and I am proud to have her as a friend. I am not easily wowed by others' performances—I'm highly critical of my own. However, Flava performed a show years ago at White Party Palm Springs in which she not only choreographed the dancers fiercely, but her own personal choreography involved her twirling a huge stick—which she did flawlessly—combined with a hot track, DJ Paulo's mix of "I Can't Get Enough," which had not been heard until then. Took my breath away. I told that bitch in the dressing room afterwards, "Now, bitch, that's what Power calls fierce!"

When I perform, my attitude is this: "If I feel it, yo' ass is gonna feel it too." Performance art is definitely spiritual. I feel like I'm taking you to church, so to speak. If someone is truly passionate about the message or the energy that they are giving, you can't help but feel it, much like a preacher who catches the spirit when he [*sic*] speaks and the rest of the church catches it with him. It's no different.

I was performing for Fireball, Chicago's now dismantled Circuit party, and I decided to do a song called "Children of the World" because of the message of the song, which was all about unity. The producers of my event had access to a gospel choir and the rest, as they say, was history. The crowd gagged when, in the middle of the show, walking down the middle of the dance floor was a fully-robed gospel choir! They joined me onstage, and the choir, coupled with an incredible cast of hot, near-naked dancers representing different races and religions, made for an amazing show.

One idea I have always wanted to see come to life, and as yet has not, has been the infusion of double Dutch jump ropers in one of my shows. I haven't been able to pull that one off as of yet. If anyone reads this and decides to take this idea as your own, I'm staking claim to it and you're perpetrating.

Chapter 5

The Girlfriends

We have to experience drugs. We have to do good *drugs, which can produce very intense pleasure. I think this puritanism about drugs, which implies that you can either be for drugs or against drugs, is mistaken. Drugs have now become a part of our culture. Just as there is bad music and good music, there are bad drugs and good drugs. So we can't say we are "against" drugs any more than we can say that we are "against" music.*

—Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live* (384)

In the early days of the Manhattan/Fire Island Circuit, the Gay male party scene underwent a serious shift that reflected the new confidence and raw sexuality of proud Gay men, a strong sense of self-worth, and an obsession with muscle that fostered body fascism. It was also the dawning of the age of club drugs beyond the old standards of alcohol, cocaine, tobacco, and marijuana. Within the Circuit community as well as the Gay male community in general, drugs are not bad per se, although certain ones are considered undesirable. For example, recreational drugs that are injected through a hypodermic needle are considered unattractive and low-class.

If anything, the attitude towards club drugs in the Circuit community fosters an elitist identity based on shared outlaw status and substance-savvy sophistication.[1] The prevalence of drugs in the Circuit scene does not include a corresponding increase in violent crime that one might expect to accompany a clandestine market for banned substances. This lack of violence cannot be ascribed to economic status

1. Elitist Circuit identity is independent of one's economic status. Although Circuiteers in general might have a higher income than the average person, not all participants are so privileged. I have seen Circuit boys who live from paycheck to paycheck while maintaining this elitist identity.

alone since drugs and nonviolence go together for Gay men in general, regardless of whether they are rich or poor. Few people involved in the distribution system identify as "drug dealers"—they consider themselves friends helping friends. Instead of viewing drug distributors as shadowy, dangerous figures, members of the Circuit community usually hold them in high regard. Lynnette A. Lewis and Michael W. Ross state:

> The drug dealers were also significant persons for dance party patrons. They were responsible for the dispensing of conscious-changing substances, caretakers and healers if necessary, a role similar to that of a shaman or some contemporary medical practitioners. (148)

Unlike popular perceptions of drug use as a social problem that should be stigmatized and even criminalized, the Circuit community recognizes that certain substances are useful tools for increasing sensual pleasure, dance intensity, self-esteem, tolerance of others, and psychic rapport with the universe. It is no surprise, then, that those who help in the distribution of those substances are often seen as valued members of the community. They act as counselors and, when necessary, "babysitters" for those who experience problems with their altered states.

A strong distaste for violence and reluctance to draw the attention of the police are two tendencies that have been in the Gay male community for a very long time. There is usually a high level of cooperation between users and distributors. A noticeable lack of friction between distributors dramatically lowers the need for violent "turf wars." This in turn reduces the visibility of the drug trade and the need for police intervention in community affairs.

Like haircuts, interior design color schemes, and boy bands, Gay men's preferences concerning intoxicating substances have shifted over the years. The darlings of the 1970s were marijuana, Quaaludes, and angel dust (PCP). Cocaine and MDMA replaced them in the '80s. Since the '90s, four drugs have been consistently in demand. In Circuit folk speech, these four substances are known as "the girlfriends" and have been given girl names: Stacy (MDMA), Katie (ketamine), Gina (GHB) and Tina (crystal methamphetamine).[2]

Drugs tend to generate cultural norms for users that differ according to substance. Rules for drinking alcohol, for example, are not the same rules for smoking pot. This is due in part to the legal status of the drug in question. But legal status is but one factor. The effects of the drug and

2. These names may change, depending on geography. I have given the names that I have heard most often. Cocaine and marijuana have their own girl names: Connie and Mary Jane, respectively.

how it is ingested, as well as the economic, ethnic, and age-related status of the users can result in significant differences in drug culture.

One reason why heroin and LSD are not especially popular Circuit drugs is because they do not meet at least three of five important criteria: the drug should enable the user to be more social, it should help the user stay awake, it should enhance the music, the user should feel sexy, and the user should feel a fun sense of delirium without becoming clumsy. In truth, not one of the four girlfriends fulfills all five of these criteria all the time. This is one reason why participants often use more than one girl simultaneously, and may add more "old school" substances (liquor, tobacco, cocaine, and marijuana) to the mix.

Stacy

Patented in 1912 by the Merck Corporation, MDMA (Methylenedioxymethamphetamine) was initially marketed as a diet pill. Rumor has it that German soldiers were given MDMA to offset hunger during World War I (Reynolds 81). Perhaps this was the reason for the stories of soldiers on both sides dropping their weapons and having soccer matches, card games, and sing-alongs, against the orders of their superiors, during the 1914 Christmas Truce (Weintraub 75–120). With all that love going on, one can only imagine what went on in the trenches.

Ecstasy has long been renowned as a therapeutic drug. Users report that MDMA helps them to drop their guard and open up to others. Psychiatrists have been asking the federal government for years to allow MDMA for victims of severe trauma. In 2003, some researchers were allowed to administer MDMA to women suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and to help terminal cancer patients deal with anxiety (Nutt et al 180, Barile 161).

The federal government, however, has been against MDMA for years, therapeutic or otherwise. Ecstasy was declared illegal for any use, even medical, in 1986. Linking the drug to Raves and the corruption of American youth, government-sponsored studies have demonstrated that even one dose of MDMA irrevocably damages the brain. These studies have been the basis for congressional action, a topic on the Oprah Winfrey Show, and an episode of *Touched by an Angel*.

On September 28, 2001, Oprah Winfrey showed brain scans of ecstasy users with prominent holes in their brains. She warned parents to watch out for certain tell-tale signs of MDMA abuse from their children, such as bright-colored clothing, expressions of love and affection, and parties in which their kids swear that they will not be drinking.[3]

3. The same information broadcast on the September 2001 show is at http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/tows_past_20010928.jhtml (accessed July 4, 2008).

On November 24 of the same year, *Touched by an Angel* ran Episode 810, "Heaven's Portal." Grace (played by actress Valerie Bertinelli), an angel sent to help a troubled teenager, takes a hit of ecstasy at a Rave and freaks out, proving that MDMA not only damages human minds but angelic ones as well.

In September of 2002, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse published a report claiming that a moderate dose of ecstasy killed laboratory animals. Congress then passed legislation designed to snuff the Rave scene. In September of 2003, however, the NIH issued a retraction of the 2002 report. Apparently, the drug that killed the test animals was not MDMA (Doblin 220).

NIH-sponsored brain scans showing permanent damage caused by one dose of MDMA to "virgin" brains were equally inaccurate. The scans had been taken from patients who were not, it turns out, MDMA virgins. The average test subject had taken ecstasy more than 200 times before researchers took the pictures. In addition, the brain images used in Oprah's exposé and for the hearings in the US Senate had been doctored—the holes (a dramatic and exaggerated representation of decreased cerebral blood flow) were not actually there (Doblin 222).

There have been, however, deaths attributed to overheating and dehydration while on MDMA. On the other side of the coin, ecstasy may also alleviate some of the agonizing pain suffered by those with Parkinson's disease (Doblin 221).

Users usually take MDMA orally, quickly accompanied by swigs of water to wash away its rather nasty flavor. Some people snort it in powder form (*doing a bump*). It may also be shoved up one's ass (*booty bump*). Not surprisingly, this can cause cramps and diarrhea.

In the harsh world of Gay nightlife, many men need something to make them feel more at ease among the myriad bitter queens, *sleazy trolls* (men who cannot keep their hands to themselves), and arrogant body fascists they face whenever they go out and about. Stacy helps some users lower their guard, communicate effectively, and bond with perfect strangers. She may also bring close friends and lovers even closer.

Rolling (getting high on ecstasy) can make users feel incredibly sensual. Music may sound better and colors appear more intense.

What goes up, however, must come down. After an incredible weekend of bonding with comrades and falling in love a dozen times (with one's own boyfriend, even!), the inevitable return to the real world can be harsh. Since MDMA is a stimulant, users may stay up too late and not eat enough, running themselves ragged. *Terrible Tuesday* (folk term for the inevitable day of reckoning) arrives, bringing with it bouts of depression and irritability.

Some Gay men approach ecstasy the same way they do alcohol: they imagine the more one does, the more fierce one is. These folks are candidates for the hospital ward when their blood pressure shoots sky high, their bodies overheat, and they become dangerously dehydrated. Conversely, they may drink too much water.

As with almost all drugs, legal and illegal, there is a law of diminishing returns. Constant use over a sustained period will render the drug less and less effective. Two things that do not diminish are the tendency for users' eyes to bulge and their teeth to grind. One Circuiteer told me that he has chipped his teeth due to chattering while under the influence. A piece of gum may seem like manna from Heaven.

Ecstasy's status as a banned substance means that there is no quality control. Most pills are cut with any number of questionable substances, including heroin, Robitussin®, and MDMA analogs that produce all of its bad effects without any of the good ones. Occasionally, a batch of dangerous pills hits the market. MDMA can also bring on sexual dysfunction, cause diarrhea, and take away the ability to urinate.

Katie

Like MDMA, ketamine hydrochloride is the baby of a big drug company (Parke-Davis). The drug was synthesized in 1962 and used recreationally in the mid-1960s. Used as an anesthetic during the Vietnam War, ketamine was discontinued because of its tendency to cause disturbing out-of-body experiences (Sanders 77–78). Current research indicates that ketamine may also have antidepressant properties (Licinio 806).

Ketamine (also known as K) hit the Gay party scene in the 1970s but did not raise the hackles of the government until the late 1990s. Its rising popularity over the last few years has brought it into the public eye and triggered a fair amount of public hysteria. Since the government has linked club drugs to Al Qaeda, date rape, and teenage deaths, distribution of ketamine has been markedly reduced in the interest of public safety and national security.

Unlike MDMA, ketamine is not considered too dangerous for regular medical treatments, especially for veterinarians. It is usually produced in liquid form for intravenous use, primarily as an animal tranquilizer. Studies have shown its potential in small doses for helping people deal with chronic pain.

At some point in their ketamine experiences, most users will go into what is called a "K-hole," a stupor in which they have trouble speaking, move in slow motion, and are extremely befuddled. A K-hole

differs from the state of drunkenness in three ways: its duration is usually much shorter (about twenty to forty-five minutes), the user is quite aware of being incapacitated, and, like MDMA, it does not foster aggressive behavior.

Most recreational users will bake the liquid and pulverize the brittle white residue into powder (Sanders 78–80), which is then snorted. It is not uncommon to see K users blow their noses and expel small chunks of white, powdery mucus. One fan of ketamine examined the contents of his facial tissue after blowing his nose and exclaimed, "There goes rent!"

Katie is a dissociative anesthetic; she causes the user to become connected and disconnected with the body, psyche, and senses in novel ways. She may enhance music, clarify thinking, and send the user into entertaining (or distressing) inner journeys.

Katie may affect sight in interesting, if not alarming, ways, such as narrowing the field of vision to a very small field, imposing patterns on incoming light, or even giving air a jellied texture. In one urban legend about ketamine, a young man had bumped himself into a state in which he could not see. He discovered, however, that when he spoke out loud, his sight returned. When he was silent, he had to stand still because he was blind. In order to move about, he had to utter a constant stream of words. This was highly amusing to him, and he began racing around the room, naming everything in sight as he went: "Lamp, couch, floor-floor-floor, dog, wall," etc.[4]

Of the four girls, Katie is considered the least dangerous. Terrible Tuesdays are not associated with her.

For some people in the party scene, Katie and Stacy are their favorite party girls. The combination of the two is especially popular with music *aficionados*. Sometimes partygoers will concoct a batch of "trail mix," powder made of K and ecstasy (along with other drugs, such as Viagra and crystal meth).

Inner journeys can bring users to hell as well as paradise. Some people report that their minds wander out of their bodies, a frightening feeling that reminded them of death. Those who do too much ketamine over long periods of time may suffer from excruciatingly painful stomach cramps and require hospitalization. Ketamine's physiological effects may also include increased blood pressure, insomnia, and occasional sexual dysfunction.

Users may experience extreme mood swings and a strong sense of paranoia. They may panic and withdraw from everyone, trapped in a pervasive sense of impending doom. On the other extreme, they may

4. Although I cannot validate this particular folktale, I do not consider it to be outside the realm of possibility.

talk incessantly and drive everybody around them crazy. Short-term memory may be impaired for the duration of the buzz. The law of diminishing returns applies to ketamine as well as MDMA: the more one does, the more one has to do.

Gina

GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) is a clear, oily liquid that depresses the central nervous system, removes furniture varnish, and ruins linoleum countertops. It was synthesized in the mid-1970s and sold as a sleep aid (Frances et al 171). GHB was also sold to weightlifters as a bodybuilding supplement (Kuhn et al 200).

In 1990, the number of emergency-room visits for respiratory failure, seizures, and comas triggered by Gina led the Food and Drug Administration to ban her (Frances 172), but the girl had just gotten started. Until 2001, emergency-room visits attributed to G overdose had risen every year since 1994 (Goldberg 196).

GHB is usually taken with a non-alcoholic drink. Any number of factors can lead to an overdose, such as not enough food before partying, improper timing between doses, mixing with alcohol, and misjudging drug strength. Tight groups of friends watch out for each other and provide support when one of them *falls out* or *crosses over* (goes comatose or into a seizure).

Why is it that a depressant can cause men to dance in a frenzy, chat away at full speed, and get sexually aroused? The answer lies somewhere in the intricacy of the human psychoneural network. If one thinks of the mind as a series of off/on switches, any basic emotion or behavior is the result of a whole series of systems being either dampened or stimulated in concert with each other. Certain systems can be stimulated by dampening those safeguards that keep them in check. With alcohol, for example, the internal barriers that keep people from expressing themselves can be put to sleep, as it were, and they may end up acting and speaking without caution and (apparently) full of energy.

GHB tranquilizes the rational guard established over physical desires. If done just right, users feel free, sexy, and full of life. There is, however, only a narrow window in which achieving this benign and pleasurable undisciplined state is possible without going into a state of no self-control. It is much easier to overdose on GHB than any other club drug. Lack of regulation in its production only compounds the problem.

A bit too much G and too many regulating systems shut down at once. Users may run around like lunatics, a sure sign that, if they stand still, convulsions will soon follow. While desperately trying to stay awake,

they will fade in and out of consciousness, often unaware that they are only partially coherent.[5]

GHB, however, is not without its medical uses. It is currently approved for the treatment of narcolepsy under the brand name Xyrem (Kuhn 200).

GBL (gamma-butyrolactone) and BD (butanediol) are chemical analogs to GHB that create the same effects of euphoria, horniness, and occasional physical trauma (Cupp and Tracy 173). On the street, they are usually labeled "GHB." BD is considered by some to be the safest form, and GBL the worst. I have found no publicly available research to confirm or deny the claim.

The ban on GHB and its analogs has been ineffective because of their many industrial uses and the comparative ease in which they may be acquired. A couple of years ago, it was convenient and inexpensive to order GHB analogs over the Internet. But in 2002, the government set up a nationwide sting operation, shutting down most of the online businesses in a couple of months and arresting people all over the country.

Although there are occasional droughts, Gina seems to be available most of the time. Of all the girls, she is usually the easiest to score. She is also a cheap date. G may generate the same kinds of sensual pleasures as MDMA but without the teeth grinding. Unlike ecstasy, G does not usually prevent erections.

Government crackdowns on Stacie and Katie have inspired many party people to turn to Gina. Others prefer it to ecstasy because recovery from a night with Gina is fairly painless. Unlike ketamine, G rarely sends the user into a state of deep introspection. It is much more about the body than the mind.

G overdoses have resulted in the closing of dance clubs on both coasts. Promoters and club owners have been put into an excruciating bind: if they kick out people who fall out, they may lose the crowd. If they call an ambulance, city officials may shut them down. By 2000, it had gotten to the point that Circuiteers would not take a swig from a proffered water bottle without first asking if it was "just water."

Problems with Gina became so serious a few years ago that promoters and club owners, normally a rather cantankerous lot, banded together with DJs to discuss solutions. The best strategy devised yet has been to invite the MedEvent team of volunteer health workers to watch over the crowd during a party and treat overdoses on the spot, referring only the most serious cases for hospitalization.

5. I have not seen any women fall out, possibly because they may not be so quick to take a substance that can so easily render them helpless.

GHB (a.k.a. "Girl Hardly Breathing") overdose is not a pretty sight. Victims vomit, go into seizures, and may become comatose; if they take enough, the result can be respiratory failure and cardiac arrest.

The biggest problems with G are that most everyone who takes it will have at least one seizure due to carelessness. In most cases, victims sleep off an overdose. Victims may have no memory of seizures or vomiting. Occasionally, they die in their sleep. An incident that has been repeated a number of times in several cities describes a male acquaintance who fell out on GHB and was put into an ambulance, taken to a hospital, and had his stomach pumped. Three hours later, he showed up at an after-party, laughing about his experience and dosing up on more G. Sometimes the story ends with his death.

Gina can inspire Circuiteers to do all kinds of unsavory things they would not normally do in public, such as bite people, flail around on the floor, moan aloud, drool, hit themselves, and make horrible faces, while completely unaware of what they are doing. Guys on G tend to sweat more. The drug has an obnoxious taste and can burn throat tissue. It can be addictive. On the other hand, G is quickly metabolized in the body without leaving a trace, at least nothing that current drug tests are tailored to pick up.

Tina

Crystal methamphetamine, a stimulant that affects the central nervous system, is a form of methamphetamine that looks like tiny shards of broken glass. Methamphetamine was first made in Japan in 1919 (Osborne 47). Both methamphetamine and amphetamine (a related compound) were used in pill form by soldiers and pilots for both Axis and Allied nations. Unlike MDMA, these stimulants tend to bring out aggression, making them attractive as combat enhancers.

The first recorded incidence of large-scale meth abuse occurred in Japan after World War II, when military stockpiles became available to the public. U.S. military use of the drug was so prevalent that it would not be a stretch of the imagination to assert that meth and amphetamine addiction in the United States began with the Armed Forces.

Amphetamine became popular outside of the military in 1950s America. Truck drivers and students used it to stay awake and improve performance. Soon, however, it was linked to sexual deviance. Investigations into drug trafficking noted a conspicuous connection between amphetamine use and homosexuals. This connection included the use of amphetamine by homosexuals in order to increase sexual libido (Osborne 56–59), much as crystal meth is used today by Gay males.

In 1965 and in 1970, the government clamped down on almost all amphetamine production and distribution except for the massive quantities the U.S. military continued to order.[6] This created a lull in illegal amphetamine use, and cocaine soon took its place during the 1970s and '80s. The military continued to order amphetamine, but not as much as they had before 1970. Gulf War pilots were still using it in 1991 (Osborne 53–55).

Tina came roaring back for civilians in the 1980s with the rise of small-scale producers who used easily accessible ingredients and means of ingestion shifted from taking a pill to snorting a powder, and then from snorting to smoking (Moriarty 5).

Crystal use in the Gay community rose sharply in the last few years when Gay men discovered once more that they could have sex for hours on it. There is now a pervasive network of Internet sites, bathhouses, and dealers that cater those who want to engage in "Party 'n' Play" (PNP). As mentioned earlier, PNP may refer to the recreational use of any drugs with sex, but it is mostly a code for crystal-fueled sex.

Alarmed by the rise in crystal meth addicts, the government has cracked down on the distribution of the common substances used for crystal production with some success. It is not an easy task, however, since many *meth houses* are out in the middle of rural nowhere, or are across the border in Mexico where clandestine meth factories produce it in bulk. The pervasiveness of the illegal drug trade in some parts of Mexico is so pronounced that they have their own folksong genre, the *narcocorrido*, which includes in its stock of outlaw-heroes the *cristalero*, crystal meth trafficker (Wald 52, 266).

Like GHB and ketamine, methamphetamine has limited medical applications, such as treating narcolepsy, obesity, and attention deficit disorder. A collaborator once showed me some blue pills a doctor had prescribed for his ADD. "These are real methamphetamine," he announced proudly. "Want one?"

The most popular means for ingesting crystal meth today are snorting and smoking. Another paradox of the human neural system is that smoking "ice" or "glass" can bring about a sense of deep calm.

Party boy after party boy has told me that Tina works for them, and that is why it is so difficult to manage. With the rise of Internet sex, boys into Party 'n' Play no longer need to go to a party or even a bar. They can order sex online, just like pizza. Even more amazing are the reports of insanely long sexual marathons with Tina. It is not unusual to hear stories of non-stop wrangling for eight, twelve, even twenty

6. In 1966, the Pentagon purchased just under 82 million ten-milligram doses (Osborne 55).

hours from both men and women. Studies done on the recent epidemic of syphilis and increase in HIV seroconversion indicate that a contributing factor is crystal sex.

Some boys balance their Gina with Tina. A common folk antidote to a G fall-out is a bump of T. I have heard Tina described as "the girl who keeps us all out of trouble."

The law of diminishing returns is even more distressingly apparent with crystal than with any other club drug. Extreme bouts of depression and despair may accompany sobriety as well. The shift from snorting to smoking is often the point at which the user becomes an addict.

The tone of this chapter has at times been lighthearted with regards to the girlfriends in the Circuit. It should not be reason for anyone to ignore the dangers that accompany addiction, be it addiction to the girlfriends, alcohol, cocaine, steroids, sex, or one's own physical beauty.

Commentary: Adam Tanner

Boston
December 2007

I found out that a former close friend who has been lost to crystal meth for a few years now had recently passed away.

When he first started using and started the patterns we have all seen, I felt guilty. Although I didn't introduce him to crystal, as a seasoned club patron, I was the person that had turned him on to nightclubs and the Circuit. In retrospect, I couldn't have known that this incredibly successful person that I loved spending time with and cared a great deal for was so insecure on the inside. I made every excuse possible for him at first because I thought he knew better and wouldn't let himself get caught up with crystal.

This man was the chief financial officer of a Fortune 500 company, and had the cars and the homes and the vacations, but not the self-esteem. Crystal apparently gave him that self-esteem that all the success couldn't. By the time we all realized that we were losing him, it perhaps was already too late.

So many people sat around and said, "Someone should talk to him," but no one would, for fear that he would cut them off from the other party drugs he began dealing once he got fired from his job. I knew I needed to do something.

Having seen other people around me start falling and getting lost to crystal, and having grown up in an alcoholic family, I knew I couldn't just sit back and not say or do something. But I also knew that only he could save himself. Once I knew for certain in my gut that he was using and getting in over his head, another friend of his and I sat down with him and had an intervention. We were probably the only people he would have listened to, who knew of his past and his relationships and of his drug use.

We sat him down at dinner and said to him, "We don't know how often or how much you are using crystal, but we can see what it is doing to you and your life and we are worried about you." I knew that harm reduction was the only route and that we couldn't save him. Only he could save himself. I also knew I couldn't just stand by and watch him slowly commit suicide. I needed to back away.

Of course he lashed out and got angry and claimed he wasn't using and had an excuse or someone to blame for everything that had happened to him. He had gotten fired, not because he would come into work two hours late regularly, but because his boss was an asshole.

Everyone was out to get him and it was only going to get worse.

After the intervention, he quickly isolated himself from me and claimed it was because I just didn't understand him anymore. This was the person I would talk to three or four times a week and travel with, whose sob stories I would listen to for hours after a bad breakup or a family problem. I remember one night in particular being in Provincetown at a party and him calling, and I stood outside of the club on the phone with him for an hour because I knew he needed someone to talk to.

Over the next few years, I would see him around at someplace he could sell drugs or just randomly at the grocery store. He lived four blocks away from me, but he had become a vampire who was never seen during the day. When I did see him, I barely recognized him as his already thin frame was so gaunt and thin that he looked like death warmed over. I thought for certain that he wasn't going to be with us much longer, and every time I saw him I made sure to let him know that I cared.

I knew he was still using, and I couldn't let myself get too close. I knew from my alcoholic family that there was nothing I could do. He knew that if he ever really needed help, I would be there.

I lost track of how many times I had told him that I'd go to whatever meetings with him he needed or rehab or anything, but that he had to make the first steps. In my gut, though, I knew that there would be no steps. He had surrounded himself long ago with other users and "yes" people. Everyone was either using him for his drugs or using them with him and would just tell him what he wanted to hear.

I heard through some mutual friends this past fall that he was actually starting to get sober, but it appears that the physical and mental damage had been done. He was too afraid to contact any of us, and the paranoia never seemed to go away. I again wanted to call but was too afraid of helplessness that I had felt before from the situation and couldn't bring myself to do it.

I went out tonight with one of my good friends who also knew this person and on the way home from the club, I asked if he had seen or heard anything from our crystal-using friend. He was surprised I hadn't heard that he had died. He had been missing for almost a month, and only when the condo association had someone go into his apartment to turn off the water that had been left running for weeks did they find him.

I feel like I should be more upset about his death, but in all honesty, I feel like I lost him long ago.

Chapter 6

Harm Reduction

What is there that is not poison?
All things are poison and there is nothing that is not poison.
Solely the dose determines that a thing is not a poison.

—Paracelsus (1493–1541)[1]

In response to the excessive and self-destructive behavior of too many Circuiteers, there has been a strong movement within the community for harm reduction, strategies and programs to reduce health risks associated with intoxication and unsafe sex in the Circuit community.

The basic principles of harm reduction are as follows: drug addiction should be treated as an illness, not a crime. Attempts to ban recreational drugs and unsafe sex are counterproductive, as are campaigns that use shame to prevent drug use or unsafe sexual practices. Education is the most effective means for reducing overdoses, addiction, and STDs. The most effective educational programs directly target the community at risk, using strategies that appeal to its members.

Harm reduction in the Circuit is a coordinated effort. Artists and media experts have designed advertisements and brochures aimed at Circuiteers to educate them about various intoxicants and safer sex. MedEvent, a volunteer group of doctors, nurses, paramedics, and EMTs from all across the country, attends Circuit parties to help people with health issues. A continuous dialogue has been set up with event promoters and venue owners to address harm-reduction issues and strategies. There is even a listserv for professionals (partysafe@yahoogroups.com) to discuss issues pertaining to harm reduction.

1. Paracelsus (a.k.a. Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim) was a Medieval alchemist-physician who recognized two basic postulates of modern toxicology: poisons should be understood in chemical, not supernatural, terms; dosage, not substance, makes a poison (Lutz 82, Fenton 5).

Along with concerns about how participants behave, harm-reduction proponents see tolerance from police officers and city officials as crucial to the health and well-being of participants. The elimination of draconian law enforcement practices in the dance scene, coupled with promoters that give the community a good party in nice settings, appears to lower stress and reckless behavior. Consequently, problems with substance abuse tend to be reduced. Many harm-reduction advocates have also made common cause with the Drug Policy Alliance, an umbrella organization dedicated to the decriminalization of recreational drugs.

Some cities go out of their way making participants feel at home, with official welcome events and banners proclaiming the events in the streets. Montreal promotes its Black and Blue Ball as a citywide event in early October for Canadian Thanksgiving weekend, Palm Springs welcomes White Party attendees with open arms every spring, South Beach in Miami publicly salutes revelers in early March for the Winter Party, and again on the US Thanksgiving weekend for its own White Party. Official municipal-wide appreciation of Circuit events is a public expression of tolerance for Gay people and recognition of the revenue brought into the city every year. Compared to other large gatherings, such as sports events or musical concerts, Circuit participants are much easier to manage, in no small part due to the lack of violence and minimal destruction of property. Municipal recognition also subtly places Circuiteers on notice that they are representatives of Gay culture, and that they should behave appropriately, at least when in public. This includes moderation in the use of intoxicants.

One notable trend in the United States, however, has been the reduction of awareness-oriented advertisements and material at the events. The Philadelphia Blue Ball 2005 did not display any guidelines describing the properties of party drugs and how to party safely. This is a significant change from Blue Ball 2001 in which posters throughout the venue and on bathroom stalls cautioned participants about the effects of certain substances. The reason for this silence is the notion commonly held by the U.S. government that there is no such thing as responsible drug use. Since America intensified its war on drugs, messages that openly advocate harm reduction rather than complete abstinence are seen as giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Canadian sensibilities on this point, however, are quite different. Advertising campaigns for harm reduction and responsible drug use continue in Toronto and Montreal.

The BBCM (Bad Boys Club Montreal) that produces Montreal's Black and Blue has been at the forefront of harm reduction and a kinder, gentler Circuit. Toronto's ACT (AIDS Committee of Toronto) likewise is

Dr. Chris Mann, founder of MedEvent, and fellow MedEvent volunteer Dr. Reed Pitre

Mickey Weems

proactive in providing information about drug use and harm reduction for Circuit events held in that city.

The last three sections of this chapter are examples of harm reduction in action. The first deals with MedEvent and its founder, Chris Mann, from Dallas (interview, June 2005). The second is Brazilian producer Ric Sena of NYC/Rio de Janeiro and how he promotes responsible behavior in his Alegria parties (interview, August 2007). The third is Bad Boys Club Montreal (BBCM), the group responsible for Black and Blue, and Montreal activist-artist Kat Coric (interview, November 2006).

MedEvent

Founded in 1998, MedEvent is a welcome presence on the dance floor. Equipped with folding lounge chairs, a sizeable medical kit, and an oxygen tank, the MedEvent staff sets up a "recovery room" near the dance floor and apart from the gaze of the curious.

The volunteers are easy to spot; they wear red shirts with the MedEvent logo. Dr. Mann described the symbols in the uniform:

> The design of the shirts is deliberate in a couple of ways: (1) white on red or vice/versa stands out even in a dark place for easy sighting. (2) The symbols used are a Swiss Cross (international medical symbol) centered inside an upside-down triangle that is easily recognized by Gays as a symbol of homosexuality, but not often by heterosexuals, in order to communicate the origin and intent of the medical group.

MedEvent staff members stand discreetly at the edge of the dance floor, ready to help anyone who looks as if there might be a health problem.

MedEvent volunteers are familiar with the Circuit scene. Many of them are themselves Circuiteers, and may be seen off-duty at events. Their familiarity includes medical knowledge based on lived experience about how to handle crises that are unique to the Circuit scene.

It is impossible to determine how many lives MedEvent has saved; before MedEvent, the Circuit was well on its way to self-destruction. A significant number of participants consistently behaved irresponsibly, especially with GHB and its comatose- and death-inducing properties. Occasionally, shortsighted party promoters would dump unconscious clientele out on the street in order to avoid calling ambulances.

The MedEvent crew changed the scene by putting the focus on compassion. Their discreet and nonjudgmental presence acts as a gentle reminder to both promoters and participants that there is more to the party than making a profit and getting cracked.

Dr. Mann is pleased with his organization. "The intended impact of MedEvent on the dance community has been achieved," he said. "Most patrons now look after each other, even strangers, much more [than previously] and are not afraid to give and seek help from us to keep the whole environment safer and more positive for us all."[2]

Ric Sena and Alegria

"Show people respect," said Ric Sena, "and they will respect you." If the party is lackluster and attendees are treated like cattle, they will feel no responsibility to behave. They are more likely to, as Sena puts it, "do bad things." He feels that people who are bored and treated poorly will do more drugs and do them irresponsibly, which leads to more overdoses and gives authorities reason to shut the party down.

Nobody wants to pay good money to dance in a dirty venue. "I've been to parties where I had to wade through trash," Sena said. A dirty venue is a clear sign of disrespect for the crowd. It would be no surprise, then, for the crowd to behave trashy. In addition to providing beautiful

2. Mann retired as director of MedEvent in August 2007.

Moody Mustapha www.moodypics.com

BBCM Dancers performing at Montreal Black and Blue 2006

décor and plenty of *gostosos* (Brazilian Portuguese for hot men), workers keep the venue as clean as possible during the party.

Horror stories abound in New York City of rude bouncers searching every nook and cranny of a person's body, confiscating all contraband materials, and then selling them back to attendees once they are inside the venue. Such tactics have not been shown to be successful in reducing overdoses. Sena realizes that personal searches are necessary but they need not be invasive. He insists that all of his workers, from door personnel to bartenders, be courteous and professional.

Sena's parties can last for seventeen hours. Such a long event should logically be a recipe for statistically higher overdoses and ambulance runs. This does not, however, seem to be the case for Alegria.

Black and Blue and the Bad Boy Club Montréal

In October 2006, I went to Quebec's big AIDS fundraiser, Black and Blue, to see for myself what the Bad Boy Club Montréal (BBCM) had created. The staff was professional and friendly. The party was visually stunning, sound and music were superb, and tickets were reasonably priced. Montreal is a joy to visit.

But life in Montreal is not always easy. Quebec is a province under pressure. Its French heritage is constantly barraged by the rest of English-speaking Canada and the gigantic monolingual presence of the United States. For the Black and Blue weekend, however, tensions

are relaxed. The city rolls out its best blue carpet for visitors from the United States, Europe, and the rest of Canada.

What really impressed me about Black and Blue is the emphasis on harm reduction. The Bad Boys Club Montréal that runs Black and Blue and other annual Circuit parties (Hot and Dry, Red Party, Bal des Boys, and Twist) coined the phrase "The Party Needs You" (in both English and French, of course: "Pour que le party soit réussi, on a besoin de toi!"). At the same time, personal responsibility is also highlighted, and the underlying message is this: the party needs you, so don't endanger your own health or ruin things for the rest of us by behaving irresponsibly. Information is readily available about the effects of recreational drugs and possible complications that could result when partiers mix them with HIV medications.

The BBCM's harm-reduction program includes a dance troupe with a strong spiritual ethos. Since the BBCM began in 1995, a group of volunteer performers came together to put on shows for events. These volunteers formed the BBCM Dancers, who dedicate their performances to the fight against AIDS, a disease that has claimed the lives of some of its members. Before every performance, they offer this prayer:

> Nous
> Hommes et femmes
> Gai-straight-bi
> Séropositifs et séronegatifs
> Gens de tous les métiers
> Sommes unis à la mémoire de ceux qui sont disparus
> Et pour le courage de ceux qui poursuivent le combat
> We
> Men and Women
> Gay, straight, bi
> Seropositive and seronegative
> From all walks of life
> Join together to remember those who are gone
> And to offer support to those who continue the fight

The BBCM Dancers are an integral part of the shows for which Black and Blue is renowned, both for their professionalism and the energy they bring to the event. If any group in the Circuit consistently represents fierceness, it would be the BBCM Dancers.

Kat Coric, a professional artist and harm-reduction activist, started out in the BBCM organization as a BBCM Dancer, A few years ago, she suggested that the organization do an annual art auction. The BBCM created a position for her; she developed the Health Education Campaign and founded the Black & Blue Annual Art Exhibition & Auction, the first of its kind within the Circuit. Coric mixes art, humor,

and health awareness to capture people's attention with eye-catching posters and flyers promoting safer sex and partying.

I noticed posters during the B&B weekend informing people with AIDS that refrigerators were provided on the premises for medications, a service started by Coric. Since functions can go for six to ten hours, HIV+ participants can party with their friends as long as they wish without skipping their vital meds schedule.

A celebrated artist in Montreal and New York, Kat Coric often gears her talents toward harm prevention in the party scene. In 2000, she did two memorable posters about crystal meth with graphic artist Charles Henri. One was a picture of Tina Turner that said, "The Only Good Tina" and the other was a photo of a long-stem crystal glass with "Crystal Is Better at Tiffany's."

Although she is no longer on the BBCM staff, Coric supports the organization whole-heartedly. She continues to work with AIDS fund-raisers and donate her art. In 2006, she volunteered once again to be a BBCM dancer for Black and Blue.

Commentary: Caroline Rousse

Montreal
October 2007

I've been working at BBCM since 1995 and am currently the BBCM Director of External Affairs. The fact that the event is more that just a party has kept me there. We work with an incredible team, and we know that we can make a difference.

Concerning harm reduction, I think it's very important to still work hard and make sure that we do give out as much information as possible. I've witnessed awful things at some events (ours and others). I think that partying is a good thing (it's essential), but it has to be done in a responsible way because it can easily get out of control and ruin your life if you overdo it.

The BBCM Foundation has been organizing parties for seventeen years. In the early days of the BBCM, the organizers realized that they should do some prevention. In the scene, not many people were doing anything while we witnessed all the problems linked to drug abuse. We thought it would be a good idea to organize a prevention campaign. We sat down with the doctors who handled our infirmary at our events, as they do research on recreational drugs and their effects, in order to produce a prevention booklet. Together, we pinned down the various drugs that we should talk about and wrote the booklet. We also decided to work on the production of posters to be put up at our events.

Not wanting to condemn or condone drug abuse, we wanted mostly to give our participants the information that they needed before they actually decide to take drugs. Our posters were humorous but gave out good information ... something that works! We got lots of good comments on them. The booklet was also printed in order to be given out at the events to all of our participants. The information got updated throughout the years. We did get requests from schools, other promoters and club owners to get some copies of our booklet. Most of the information can be found on our Web site: www.bbcm.org (in the "party safely" section). We even had requests from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to get our information, as they also organize symposiums on drugs and wanted to see the most updated information on recreational drugs.

Our goal is mostly to make sure that people take their responsibilities seriously and that if they choose to take drugs, they at least know the dangers and know what not to mix, for instance.

In a way, we feel that our government should definitely do more prevention. Most of the information that we have gathered should be given

to people before they actually show up at our events. This information should be available in high schools and also should be given to parents. We feel that people only talk about drugs to condemn their use or to say how many dealers were arrested, but we should be more open to discuss the real picture: who takes drugs, why, how can we talk about it, etc.

Moody Mustafa, www.moodypics.com

Fire Island Morning Party 1997

Part 2

Tribe

Bill Haberkam and JustCircuit, www.justcircuit.com

New Year and Pride celebrations often become Circuit weekends in major cities. New Years-Miami 2002-2003

Chapter 7

A History of Festive Homosexuality 1700–1969 CE

Queer balls, dances, and club spaces offered a much more intense space for ritual than many churches could—or can.

—Mark Jordan[1]

As a Gay festive movement that celebrates the forbidden, the Circuit has ancestors. The oldest Gay communities are remembered today because of parties and scandals that occurred 300 years ago. In fact, modern LGBTQ history revolves around Stonewall, the most notorious and publicized Gay party-scandal in history, a pivotal event in 1969 that involved dancing, liquor, cross-dressing, and three days of civil unrest mixed with street revelry.

In the trajectory of Gay festival history, tolerance of homosexuality is intimately linked to humor. Festive expression of same-sex attraction is usually encoded in comical and often spectacular gender-bending performance, both within and outside of Gay communities. Oppression arises when the outside world resists being dazzled and quits laughing, when what was hilarious and stunning is reinterpreted as dangerous.

As a chronicle of same-sex love, Gay history goes back thousands of years. But same-sex communities can only be said to exist if there is convincing evidence of distinctly homosexual culture. There is little in the historical record confirming the existence of groups whose

1. Personal communication, January 2008. Jordan is a renowned Gay scholar in religious studies. He is the author of *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (1997), *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (2002), and *Blessing Same-Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage* (2005).

members defined themselves by their same-sex orientation before the eighteenth century.

Even today, there is no precise, standardized terminology for same-sex attraction, communities, and identities. Language has been severely imprecise for a couple of reasons. First, there has been a tradition of oppression in many countries that encouraged people not to publicly express same-sex erotic feelings. The language used for these feelings is often cryptic, damning, and insulting. Arrest records of people accused of violating social norms concerning homosexuality speak of the crimes committed as so heinous that they should not be expressed in words. Convoluted and obscure language was common in official documents in the process of legal inquiry and sentencing.

Second, it is possible to engage in same-sex romance for a lifetime, yet never identify oneself with others in the same situation. Participation in same-sex romance is not synonymous with public support for such romances.

Mangled language about homosexuality for the sake of moral propriety suggests fascinating dynamics of social anxiety, especially concerning manliness. Scholars can reduce the linguistic confusion by defining terms with more precision. For clarity's sake, I will use "homosexual" [2] to refer to women and men in every age and society who feel same-sex romantic attraction. "Gay" will include those homosexuals who form their own communities and cultures based on acceptance, celebration of same-sex love, and undisciplined gender expression.

Early 1700s: Molly Houses

The earliest evidence of Gay communities goes back to eighteenth-century "molly houses" in England where homosexual men (called "mollies"[3]) developed their own identity and festive culture in private clubs. Members could drink alcoholic beverages, sing, dance, dress up and behave like women, adopt girl names, and perform mock births. They would engage in marriages—which included serious ones based on lifetime commitment—and frivolous ones, temporary one-night stands called "wedding nights." Sexual encounters with each other were conducted in back rooms called "chapels."

2. Originally, *homosexual* was a term coined in the mid-nineteenth century to describe same-sex sexual orientation in medical-physiological-psychological language. Today, it is slightly pejorative. Nevertheless, the word is useful in describing those with same-sex orientation but not necessarily the awareness or acceptance of the Gay community or culture. For my purposes, "homosexual love" and "same-sex romance" are synonymous.
3. "Molly" is a nickname for "Mary," and "moll" was a slang term for a prostitute (Spencer 188). I do not know if "molly" was a name by which Gay men identified themselves, or if it was the equivalent of "faggot," so it is not capitalized.

Once inside the molly house, Gay men would be free to cut loose with behavior that was unorthodox, scandalous, and hilarious. From accounts given by Samuel Stevens, an agent for the Societies for the Reformation of Manners who raided Margaret (Mother) Clap's molly house in 1726, same-sex lovemaking between men went hand-in-hand with effeminate performance.

> I found between 40 and 50 men making love to one another, as they called it. Sometimes they would sit in one another's laps, kissing in a lewd manner and using their hands indecently. Then they would get up, dance and make curtsies, and mimic the voices of women…. Then they would hug, and play and toy, and go out by couples into another room on the same floor to be married, as they called it. (Norton 55)

Stevens's description of male same-sex love as synonymous with effeminate behavior may have been an attempt to portray mollies as more gender-perverse than they really were. Mollies did not always dress up as women.[4] In fact, feminine clothing was mostly reserved for special events such as a masquerade and a "lying-in" (mock birth). Feminine dress and/or mannerisms appeared to have no bearing on sexual roles of penetrator or penetrated. Mollies were not helpless weaklings, as police discovered on December 1725 when the men they arrested in a molly house decided to resist (Norton 96–101).

Stevens's report reveals a fascination with the spectacle of the molly house, a fixation on gender-bending performance and same-sex attraction. Fascination and revulsion would be repeated in accounts of drag balls in the early twentieth century and Circuit parties at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.

Mollies had developed their own festive culture. They had their own slang, which included *battersea'd* (a term for sexually transmitted infection),[5] *back room* (a private place for sex (Norton 62)),[6] and *maiden names* that they gave each other.

Police records show that maiden names for mollies were often preceded with "Madam," "Miss," "Mrs." or "Aunt." Sometimes the names would indicate the real-life job of the molly, such as Orange Deb (Martin Macintosh, an orange seller), Dip-Candle Mary (candle maker), and

4. Molly houses would eventually lose their reputations as havens for male-to-female cross-dressing in the nineteenth century (Spencer 193), perhaps as a security measure to keep away the authorities that might view the presence of cross-dressing as a sign of depravity.
5. "Battersea'd" is a word used by mollies that probably means to have a penis infected with venereal disease and required treatment with special medicinal herbs grown in Battersea Park.
6. "Back room" is still used today. Some Gay bars have specially-designated back rooms for sex.

Nurse Mitchell (barber; in those days, barbers also did minor surgery). Sometimes the names did not: Kitty Cambric (coal merchant), Black-Eyed Lenora (drummer of the Guards), and Miss Sweet Lips (grocer). Well-built men received maiden names , such as Fanny Murray (a beefy bargeman) and Lucy Cooper (a muscular coal-heaver). Others preferred names that were grand as well as humorous, especially considering the occupation of the men holding the title: Aunt England (soap-boiler), Lady Godiva (waiter), the Duchess of Gloucester (butcher), Queen Irons (probably a blacksmith), and the fabulous Princess Seraphina (butcher). Molly, Margaret, and Mary were favorite first names (Norton 92–93).[7] "Margaret Clap" appears to have been the legal name of the proprietress of Mother Clap's molly house. I question, however, if that was her original name from birth. "Clap" also referred to a venereal disease in the early eighteenth century, just as it does today. Since mollies had a fondness for hilarious speech, they likely appreciated Mother Clap's name for its sexual innuendo.

Once again, the names given to engagers in same-sex love were not descriptive of acts but part of the hilarious performance of molly identity. The importance of these names in marking mollies as feminine (the names were, after all, preserved in the legal proceedings) was arguably given more weight by the outside world than by the mollies themselves.

Molly houses disappeared from history in the nineteenth century, and for good reason. Men accused of being mollies were arrested, fined, beaten, pilloried, imprisoned, and executed.[8] The situation forced the Gay community to go deeper underground where it was no longer as visible to the public eye (Norton 191–93).

Although hard evidence in the historical record for Gay communities would diminish with the successful persecution of molly-house culture, Gay society appears to have survived under different maiden names. At the beginning of the 1800s, molly became margery. By the end of the century, margery turned into mary-ann (Norton 105). The change in names was probably inspired by the need for in-house secrecy as much as a shift in verbal fashions—once a name gained currency in the outside world, a new one would take its place.

Eighteenth-century raids on homosexual activity also give an account of an early public statement of Gay pride. When apprehended in 1726 by plainclothes police for putting an undercover agent's hand

7. These maiden names were taken from court records of men who were brought up on charges of sodomy. "Miss," "Mary," "princess," and "queen" are still popular in the Gay male community.

8. Women could be arrested as well. Mother Clap was brought to court, fined, pilloried, and sent to prison for running a molly house. It is not known if she survived the ordeal.

on his penis in a public park, William Brown was reported to have said, "I think there is no Crime in making what use I please of my own body" (Norton 58).

1890s–1969: "Gay" Adoption

The history of Gay communities in the United States can be traced back to the nineteenth century.[9] It was not until the 1930s, however, that these communities were called "gay."

At the end of the 1800s, New York City became a hotspot for homosexual socializing, including communal dance. According to George Chauncey,

> In the half-century between 1890 and the beginning of the Second World War, a highly visible, remarkably complex, and continually changing gay male world took shape in New York City. That world included several gay neighborhood enclaves, widely publicized dances and other social events, and a host of commercial establishments where gay men gathered, ranging from saloons, speakeasies, and bars to cheap cafeterias and elegant restaurants. (1)

But it was still necessary for homosexuals to be discreet about who they were, so the innocent word "gay" was used as a code to inform others about one's sexual orientation.

Actually, *gay* was not that innocent of a word. Like molly, gay was initially associated with prostitution. The word "gay" became code for men and women who were homosexual in the early twentieth century (Hogan and Hudson 229). During that time, the outside world was not familiar with the term. People with same-sex desires were known as *inverts*, *degenerates*, *perverts*, *queers*, *homos*, and *deviants*. Homosexual men were regularly called *pansy*, *faggot*, and *fairy*. Lesbians were called *dykes*, while *bull dagger* was used in the African American community.[10]

Initially used to describe bars rather than people, "gay" is a term that came from the homosexual community to describe itself. When one was a stranger in town, it was a subtle way to discover where the right bars were without necessarily giving away one's sexual orientation (Chauncey 14–20). The popularity of the term also indicates how important fun and hilarity were as identity markers. Laughter was a

9. There is ample evidence of homosexuality in Native American communities, and that homosexuals were tolerated, even revered, by certain Native peoples. See *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*, Will Roscoe, coordinating editor (15–93); *The Zuni Man-Woman*, Roscoe; *Gay American History*, Jonathan Katz (Section 4: "Native Americans/Gay Americans: 1528–1976").

10. Most of these terms are still current.

means of resistance, reflecting the refusal of the community to sink into utter despair in times of persecution.

Perhaps the first public use of "gay" to hit the media was in the 1938 film, *Bringing Up Baby*. There is a scene where famous actor and sex symbol Cary Grant is wearing a woman's fur-trimmed nightgown. "I just went gay all of a sudden!" he gushes when asked why he dressed that way. The line was ad-libbed, suggesting that the term was current in actors' circles (Chauncey 18, Hogan and Hudson 229). Not only were Gay folks participating in large numbers behind the scenes in the entertainment world, they were also represented in some of the productions. Cabarets and burlesque shows in Times Square regularly featured routines peppered with humorous homosexual innuendos. Drag performances called "pansy shows" were the rage in the early 1930s.

Theater was the first public institution in America to present LGBTQ people with sympathy. Two major theatrical productions with homosexual content came out in the 1920s; the media and the police censored both when they aimed for Broadway. The first was *The Captive*, which dealt with the so-called problem of Lesbianism. The second was *The Drag*, written by Mae West (with the help of some Gay friends), which defended Gay male culture and was performed by Gay men. *The Captive* raised eyebrows and provoked threats of censorship but succeeded to run for about a year before it was shut down. *The Drag*, however, never made it to Broadway. In February 1927, West and members of her cast were arrested for *The Drag* and other productions (including West's controversial play, *Sex*) before *The Drag* reached the Great White Way. Mae West was sentenced to ten days in jail for "maintaining a public nuisance." Productions such as *The Drag* that dealt frankly with homosexuality and/or presented openly Gay people were legally banned from the stage that same year (Chauncey 311–13).

Drag Balls

The growing visibility of Gays on stage was complemented by the public glamour of drag balls, extravagant productions where men, mostly men of color, dressed and carried themselves as women. Drag balls were popular in New York and other cities such as New Orleans, Chicago, and Baltimore during the 1910s, '20s and '30s.[11] They were magnificent playgrounds for breaking taboos: dazzling, cosmopolitan, witty, hilarious, and spectacular. Most prominent among them were the Harlem drag balls of New York City.

Homosexuality in men was still equated with effeminate behavior, just as it was in the days of molly houses. Many Gay men continued

11. Chauncey 1–7.

the tradition of giving each other girl names. What was different about the drag balls was the public visibility of cross-dressing, and the elevated status of the balls as glamorous, high-society functions rather than secret, criminal gatherings of butchers, blacksmiths, and candlestick makers.[12]

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, newspapers regularly reported drag balls as part of the social calendar for the elite. The socialite magazine *Broadway Brevities* had various witty articles written about Gay society by authors with names steeped in sexual innuendo, such as "Stephen O'Toole," "John Swallow Martin," and "Connie Lingue." On March 14, 1932, *Broadway Brevities* had an article entitled "FAG BALLS EXPOSED: 6000 Crowd Huge Hall as Queer Men and Women Dance at 64th Annual Masquerade," which claimed that "Merrymakers from 25 States" joined in the revelries (Chauncey 300). In addition to the outrageous double-entendre of the article's name, it confirms that drag balls were more than simply pageants; they were also festivals with communal dancing for both Gay men and Lesbians. The geographical diversity of attendees also suggests a regular circuit of drag balls from city to city for *aficionados*, performers, and party people.

Drag balls were modeled after debutante balls that officially presented young women to society. When a Gay man made his debut at a ball, it was a celebration of public identity. He was not simply coming out in front of other Gay men. He (or in this case, *she*) came out in front of *everybody*. According to Chauncey,

> The Baltimore debutantes, after all, came out in the presence of hundreds of straight as well as gay and lesbian spectators at the public hall of the fraternal order of Elks. Their sisters in New York were likely to be presented to thousands of spectators, many of whom had traveled from other cities, in some of the best-known ballrooms of the city, including the Savoy and Rockland Palace in Harlem and the Astor Hotel and Madison Square Garden in midtown. (7)

Eventually, whatever elitist status the drag balls possessed was not enough to save them from prosecution by the morally outraged, and the balls were banned for being subversive. Much of the crackdown was the work of the New York YMCA's Society for the Suppression of Vice, founded in 1872. This anti-vice organization was dedicated to eliminating birth control, obscenity in the arts, prostitution, and race-mixing (Chauncey 138–39). Colin Spencer theorizes that the higher ethics of

12. The glamour of the drag balls did not prevent men with low economic and social status from grabbing the limelight. The most popular balls featured African American queens whose fame depended on their beauty, outfits, and drag personas, not their identities outside the magical world of the drag balls.

tolerance promoted by the Gay community toward women and Blacks was as great a threat to the establishment as the evils of sodomy:

> What is significant is that equality between black and white, and male and female, appears to have been generated by homosexuality itself.… It is one aspect of homosexuality that the rest of society unconsciously fears, that if it had the power it would enact legislation, not just to remove all stigma and injustice from itself, but from all other oppressed minorities as well. (345)[13]

After World War I, social purity groups became more and more preoccupied with homosexuality. This was due in part, to a feeling of guilt its members had resulting from what they perceived as their success in reducing female prostitution. They reasoned that lack of female streetwalkers (and exposure to the French during the Great War) drove men, especially servicemen, into the arms of pansies (Chauncey 146–48).

The growing visibility of Gays in urban festive culture during the 1920s and '30s led to a crackdown on more explicit portrayals of homosexuality onstage. Theatrical drag balls, with their race-mixing as well as their homosexual content, would go underground but not truly die. The social forces, erotic desires, and aesthetic impulses that dated back to the days of molly houses would be resurrected again and again as drag balls transformed and diversified.

Away from the public eye, drag shows and contests continued. They became the drag queen and king performances and pageants that permeate Gay culture today. Two new drag traditions would appear many years later. The first is the Ballroom scene that began in the 1970s and continues today. These contests of *realness* (the ability to pass in society with whatever gender- and status-coded outfit one chooses to wear, be it rich, poor, masculine, or feminine, including military outfits) and competitive dance/posing that characterizes *voguing* and *runway* are direct descendants of drag ball culture. From Ball culture and drag queen pageantry came the second new tradition: fierce, semi-drag, lip-sync shows by performance artists like Kitty Meow, Power Infiniti, Jo-Jo Infiniti, Kevin Aviance, and Flava that originated in the Circuit during the '90s and continue to this day.

When the police started closing down legitimate venues for drag balls and other Gay functions, formal ballroom dances for Gay folk were downsized as they transformed into house parties and illegal dance clubs until

13. It is not always the case, however, that Gay organizations are racially tolerant. Mardi Gras krewes (festival clubs) made up of White Gay men have been legally chartered in New Orleans since 1961. They were not renowned for racial tolerance any more than Straight krewes (Loughery 276).

Stonewall. The Depression hit just about everyone, so rich and poor alike were throwing rent parties, private fundraisers where charity truly began at home. Many were small affairs, but some were large events thrown by formerly rich Gay folk who wanted to keep their fine houses. At their height in early 1940s New York, extravagant house parties formed a regular Saturday night circuit of their own (Chauncey 279).A feature of Gay African American house parties in Harlem was the presence of both men and women, in part as a strategy to avoid police raids. Couples composed of a man and a woman would arrive and leave the parties to preserve the appearance of being heterosexual. Once inside, women would dance with women, and men with men (Chauncey 279–80).

Prohibition allowed a brief space for Gay culture to flourish in the huge underground bar scene (Chauncey 148). Once liquor became legal, that space disappeared. At the same time, it became more difficult for the increasingly public drag ball scene to avoid scrutiny by the authorities, including the military. Public censure of the Gay community gained momentum just before the United States entered World War II. The inevitable backlash was intensified when the ominous threat of war sobered the nation. Being Gay was no longer considered a laughing matter because homosexuality was understood to be a threat to national security (Chauncey 331–54). The promotion of martial masculinity of America fostered intolerance for pansies as the country prepared for war against Nazi Germany and imperial Japan. This manly intolerance contributed to the general backlash that came with greater public visibility of drag balls, just as the rise of militant and hyper-masculine National Socialism in Germany snuffed out the thriving and increasingly visible Gay community in Berlin during the 1930s.

World War II and Gay Awareness

On the other hand, World War II was also significant in the formation of Gay male communal awareness. The mobilization of men from across the country, separated from the usual constraints of family and friends, and exposed to the intimate day-to-day contact that barracks buddies had with each other, also led thousands of homosexual servicemen to furlough cities such as San Francisco and New York where they encountered discrete Gay communities (Chauncey 11–12).

Nevertheless, the military was committed, especially in the latter part of the war, to keeping these men from sleeping with each other. City ordinances against serving openly Gay men led to a proliferation of exclusively Gay bars in major urban centers. Many Gay bar owners bribed police on a regular basis so that their establishments

would remain open.[14] Nevertheless, there was always the threat of vice squads and military police closing their bars in the 1940s, '50s, and well into the '60s (Boyd 108–47, Atkins 91).

In spite of oppression from both civil and military authorities, homosexual soldiers returning from the war came home with a stronger sense of their own manliness. The validation of masculinity and citizenship by means of military service during World War II was an important factor in the equal rights movement for Native, Asian, Hispanic, and African Americans. It also helped the emerging Gay community define itself, not as deviance from masculinity, but as potentially masculine for "butch" Gay men and even hyper-masculine forms, as in the Leather scene with its paramilitary attire. Their experiences in the field of battle certified many Gay male soldiers in the post-war era as legitimate men. For them, male sexual identity was no longer restricted to either being a real man or a pansy.

The tradition of military balls within Circuit party weekends[15] is an expression of the eroticization of the Gay man in uniform that inspired private Gay-friendly events thrown by military men and their admirers after World War II. One of my fellow Marines (who wishes to remain anonymous) told me that such parties occur regularly today. Retired personnel who are no longer in danger of military dismissal for being homosexual usually frequent these gatherings. Attendees may also include men currently in uniform who are willing to take the risk of expulsion by socializing with other servicemen whose sexual orientation does not conform to regulations.

Large urban centers allowed masculine Gay men to fade into the masses. Even though big cities had certain areas with a more obvious Gay presence, the development and expression of a public Gay male masculinity was severely limited by socially imposed pressures on these men to remain invisible. Notions of being a real man would be mostly projected onto the Straight male as the only manly, and thus desirable, man (Bronski 103).

1930s–1960s: Fire Island

The geography of Gay America includes safe havens at beach resorts, such as Provincetown (Massachusetts), Key West, Saugatuck (Michigan), Rehoboth (Delaware), 12th Avenue access in South Beach (Florida), West Street access in Laguna Beach (California), 82nd

14. Nan Boyd's book on San Francisco (*Wide-Open Town*) and Gary Atkins's book on Seattle (*Gay Seattle*) go into detail about the importance of police bribery and consequential cooperation from law officers in the formation of Gay urban communities.
15. Military balls are parties in which the dress code is military and paramilitary gear.

Avenue access in Myrtle Beach (South Carolina), and Queen's Beach in Honolulu.[16] Yet none of these resorts and beaches has the notoriety of Fire Island.

Fire Island is a barrier island just off the coast from Long Island, New York, with approximately thirty small communities, including Cherry Grove. According to anthropologist Esther Newton, author of *Cherry Grove, Fire Island*, "The Grove" became a retreat for Gays as early as the 1930s. This was due primarily to its reputation as a resort for Manhattan theater people (*Cherry Grove* 13, 21–35). There were no churches or standing police force, and it is still this way today. *Grovers* (residents of Cherry Grove) conduct town business and religious services in their community theater.

There are good historical reasons why Cherry Grove, which Newton calls "America's First Gay and Lesbian Town," did not have a church but did invest in a theater. Newton points out the importance of theater for the Gay community:

> For centuries, homosexuals and theater have been silent partners in their conflict with churches. By saying that theater is gay anti-church, I point to its social functions of affiliation and solidarity, and to the way theater has provided an iconography and sensibility for homoeroticism, in opposition to the way churches have worked for reproductively oriented society. And I also mean this: because of the biblically justified enmity toward sodomy, gays have been alienated from Christianity and persecuted by it; they have sought both alternatives and resistance in theatricality as an ethos, and theaters as institutions, which is why I call theater a gay "anti-church"—a queer Noah's Ark against the flood of domination…. Life was experienced theatrically by Grovers because underground gay culture had descended from the theater world and continued to find a haven from its enemies there in both the power of dramatic representation and in everyday theatrical life. (*Margaret Mead* 35–36)

Another Gay community, the Fire Island Pines, would develop just northeast of Cherry Grove. The Pines would also use its theater for town business and religious services,[17] thus making theater more like Gay church than anti-church. Between the two communities is the Meat Rack, a wooded area that is popular as a place for men to have sex with men.[18]

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16. Provincetown, Saugatuck, South Beach, and Laguna Beach have their own Circuit events.
17. To this day, neither community has a police station per se, but they do have police booths.
18. Rumor has it that the Meat Rack once had a section in it called the Donut Rack where women would have sex with women (Newton, *Cherry Grove* 231-32).

Fire Island was renowned decades before Gay liberation for its house parties and drag shows of both sexes. The custom of *tea dances* (social gatherings held in early afternoon) began there, which the Circuit keeps alive along with the Fire Island community. Even more so than the growing Gay enclaves in Manhattan and other large cities, Cherry Grove and the Pines were idyllic models of what life could be like for LGBTQ folk without police and religious persecution.

This did not mean, however, that Fire Island was completely immune to homophobic violence. Gay-bashers came over from Long Island in search of victims.[19] So did the police, who would conduct the occasional raid in the clubs, on the beach, and in the Meat Rack.

In 1968, a year before the Stonewall awakening, police were forced to stop vice raids on the Meat Rack from adjacent Long Island. Lawyers from the Gay activist Mattachine Society helped end the practice by tying up the courts with jury trials for every defendant caught in a raid, accusing officials of harassing its Gay residents in an attempt to force them to sell their real estate at a loss, and arguing that public sex in the Meat Rack was not a criminal offense because, in a predominantly Gay community, such acts were not a public nuisance (Newton, *Cherry Grove* 197–201).[20]

Because of the its fabulous parties, large Gay population, and reputation as a safe refuge, Fire Island became known across the nation as a Gay mecca in both Straight and Gay communities, right up there with San Francisco. Its notoriety was so widespread that I had heard of Queer Fire Island in Jacksonville, Alabama, during the 1970s when I was in high school, even though I had never met an openly Gay person.

1950s and 1960s: Pre-Stonewall Resistance across America

Although vitally important in LGBTQ history, Manhattan was not the only place that saw resistance to oppression against Gays.

The first group to successfully bring homosexuals out of the shadows was the Mattachine Society (initially called the Society of Fools), formed in 1950 in Los Angeles.[21] It took its name from a secret fraternity of

19. Both Lesbians and Gay men had been victimized (Ibid 204).
20. In addition to the efforts of the Mattachine Society, Newton also reports that fewer Fire Island residents were secretly calling the police to report public sex and instigating raids. As the Gay population grew and the Straight population got used to the antics of Gay men and Lesbians, amused tolerance rather than disgust became the prevailing reaction to the goings-on in the Meat Rack.
21. The Mattachine Society was not the first organization in the United States to advocate for Gays. In Chicago in 1924, the Society for Human Rights was formed to protect the rights of homosexuals. Although it was granted a charter by the state of Illinois, its members were arrested in 1925. The Society was swiftly shut down for being a "sex cult" (Katz 385–93).

bachelors in Renaissance France that would conduct dances during the Feast of Fools held on the spring equinox. Always masked when they danced, the fraternity would sometimes protest the oppression of the peasants. The founder of Mattachine, Harry Hay, saw the homosexual community in the same way: a masked people who were capable of bringing justice to the oppressed (Katz 412).

The government harassed the Mattachine Society during the McCarthy purges of the 1950s, and it officially disbanded in 1961. But homophile organizations in large cities continued to call themselves Mattachine societies (Hogan and Hudson 384). These groups helped set the stage for the Gay liberation movement.

It should be noted that the Mattachine Society and its spin-offs had a reputation for propriety despite the origin of the name as a carnival troupe. They did not appear to use the term "Gay" when referring to themselves, perhaps because of its association with the bar scene. In order to win acceptance from the public, Mattachine members were expected to follow standard conventions concerning dress and behavior appropriate for men and women. Since their proposal of equality for homosexuals was already radical in the eyes of most Americans, they did not want to aggravate the situation by looking too queer, especially when the government began to persecute its members. Women could not wear pants, and men had to wear conservative shirts and ties. The Society considered itself to be a respectable homophile (same-sex loving) organization, not a radical Gay activist group.

In San Francisco, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) was founded in 1964. Not comfortable with the Straight-laced attitude and image requirements of the Mattachine Society, SIR was more community-oriented (Hogan and Hudson 512). SIR worked with city health officials and began a VD awareness campaign. The organization opened the first Gay community center in 1966 in an old union building on Sixth Street between Mission and Market. They also held dances, perhaps the first ones to mix activism with partying. The mix was not always successful in raising people's awareness, however. Activists became disillusioned when the folks they were trying to convert into a politically-conscious community were more concerned with having a good time (Loughery 280–82), a complaint that would later be aimed at the Circuit.

San Francisco was also the home for the Daughters of Bilitis, the first Lesbian organization in the United States. Founded in 1955, the DOB was initially more like the Mattachine Society than SIR, with an emphasis on education, equal rights, and safe havens for meetings rather than festive culture.

This did not mean, however, that the Daughters of Bilitis were against having a party. When DOB and SIR teamed up with Christian

ministers in San Francisco to form the Counsel on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) in 1964, The CRH sponsored a New Year's costume ball at the end of that same year.

Perhaps only in San Francisco could dancing, revelry, religion, and Gays come together five years before Stonewall. Not amused by the idea of clergy partying with homosexuals, law enforcement officials met with the ministers and told them that they had better not go through with the ball. When the fundraiser proceeded anyway, paddy wagons lined up at the venue, photographers shamed the attendees by taking their pictures, and police arrested four people when they protested (Loughery 286). The public outcry against the police dramatically improved LGBTQ civil rights and galvanized the Bay Area Gay community (Loughery 287).

Gay activists such as the Reverend Troy Perry in Los Angeles became progressively more confrontational. Perry was a Pentecostal minister who was defrocked in the early 1960s for being homosexual. After years of soul searching, he decided to form a Gay-affirming Christian congregation[22] and founded the Metropolitan Community Church in 1968 (Hogan and Hudson 387). The first venue for worship outside of Perry's home was the Encore Theater in Hollywood, and the first service held outside of LA was in the back room of a Gay bar in Orange County (Clendinen and Nagourney 57), reflecting once again the importance of theater and bar culture for Gays.

Not to be left out, the South was bringing together a brotherhood of Gay men through the Emma Jones social network. It started in 1965 in the beach resort town of Pensacola on the Florida panhandle. A group of White Gay male friends wanted to avoid harassment from postal services when they ordered sexually explicit Gay movies, books, and magazines. They devised a fictitious identity, "Emma Jones," who had "her" own post office box, and recruited a female friend to pick up mail from that address (Loughery 273–74).

It is likely that officials at the post office knew what was going on. Southern culture tends to put a high premium on public discretion when normally upstanding citizens are doing something they may consider wrong. This may be seen as an extension of the born-again sentiment of tolerance for personal weakness voiced by St. Paul when he said, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). More often than not, this sentiment is extended to sexual backsliders and closeted drinkers. To outsiders, it may seem hypocritical,

22. Although nominally Christian, MCC congregations tend to accept people of all faiths. The LGBTQ Jewish movement had some of its first meetings in MCC church facilities. The MCC church in Toronto is multi-faith-oriented in its congregation and its approach to religion.

but to those of us who have lived in the region, it allows people with radically different social positions (often based on race, gender, and family background) to co-exist with at least the façade of decorum. It is in this space of public propriety, tempered with unspoken tolerance of private deviance, that Emma Jones was able to function in a society that *officially* did not accept such things as homosexuality.

This circle of friends sponsored a beach party on July 4, 1966, with 50 participants. In 1967, 200 showed up. By 1968, the event had doubled its size to 400. At this point, Emma's beach party was large enough to catch the attention of the local police, who only required that the revelers be discreet and clean up the trash afterwards. Local businesses had noticed that Gay visitors brought in a lot of money, which in itself was a great means for promoting good public relations (Loughery 274–75).

Emma Jones was an early Circuit prototype, a working model for how Straights and Gays could work together in the spirit of discretion, respect, and mutual profit. Rather than being confrontational, the men and women of Emma Jones used festival to form social networks and create a climate of greater tolerance for Gays in a predominantly Straight Bible Belt community.

Gay liberation (and the Circuit) was much more than simply a movement that suddenly burst into existence in one place at one time. Things were happening across the United States and abroad that signaled the emergence of a new Gay awareness. However, none of these people, organizations, or incidents gained national and international attention the way that Stonewall did.

1969: Stonewall

Like much of LGBTQ culture today, the Circuit has its roots in Stonewall.

The Stonewall Inn on 53 Christopher Street was a seedy Gay men's dance bar in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. Owned by the Mafia, it was an illegal juke joint posing as a legitimate business. Drinks were watered down. There was no running water, so glasses were rinsed in tubs of stale water and used again. Drugs were available if the buyer had the right connections. As shady as it was, the Stonewall Inn was the most popular male Gay bar in the Village, perhaps because it was the only one in New York City that allowed people to dance to music from its jukebox (Duberman 181–82).

Although the clientele was predominantly male, Stonewall's door staff admitted a very mixed crowd in terms of ethnicity, race, occupation, and gender (Straight men were turned away). All kinds frequented the inn: nelly flamers, working-class men, Wall Street types, chicken hawks

(older men in search of younger men and teenage boys), teenage boys, drag queens, some hippies, and a few women (Duberman 182–87).

The owners of Stonewall had a fairly comfortable relationship with the police of the Sixth Precinct. Once a week, an officer would stop by to pick up approximately $2,000 in cash. This permitted the management to maintain the illusion that the Stonewall Inn was a private bottle club, a loophole in the liquor laws for a bar in which the clientele could bring their own beverages so that no liquor license was required. The $2,000 also meant that the police would announce their raids in advance, and not during peak business hours. But just in case police *did* show up unannounced, a warning system of lights would notify customers to stop dancing. Bartenders would then grab the cash made from drink sales and melt into the crowd (Duberman 185, 194–95, Loughery 314).

On June 28, 1969, there was an unscheduled police raid on the Stonewall Inn at a little after 1:00 AM. A crowd gathered to taunt the police, who were filling their paddy wagon with Stonewall staff and cross-dressers. That same crowd booed the arresters, and cheered for the arrested as they posed for the crowd and waved like celebrities while being ushered out of the bar. Tradition has it that trouble broke out when a police officer pushed a Lesbian dressed in men's clothing, and she pushed back (Hogan and Hudson 526, Loughery 316). Angry words led to rocks, bottles, and coins (symbolizing the bribes that police demanded from Gay establishments) thrown at the officers. According to Loughery, drag queen-turned-activist and Gay icon Sylvia Rivera, a Stonewall regular, yelled, "You already got the payoff, but here's some more!" as the coins were flung. The police barricaded themselves in the bar until reinforcements arrived (Loughery 316–17, Hurewitz 6). Three days of civil insurrection ensued. Gay liberation, some 270 years in the making, had officially begun.

It was liberation, however, on Gay terms. Stonewall was a lesson in successful violence management. Nobody on either side was shot, and nobody was killed, although plenty of Gays (and some Straight allies) were beaten. Hilarity and silliness played an important role in keeping things from getting too far out of hand. In fact, Stonewall was just as much a street party as it was an insurrection.

Public resistance consisted of hitting the police in the ego with wit and humor as well as sticks and stones. Accounts of Stonewall describe Gay men[23] taunting law enforcement officers with performances of

23. Other than the notion that Stonewall started with a Lesbian's resistance, there is little mention of women. This does not mean that women did not play a more substantial role in the insurgency. Their rare appearance on record could be due to erasure by the press or by men who wrote the history of Gay liberation.

camp and then running away (Kaiser 197–202). Riot police became unwitting cast members of street theater directed by drag queens, who were the stars of the show. A chorus line of queens danced in front of the police, high-kicking Rockettes-style in a row, while singing the following ditty:

> We are the Stonewall Girls
> We wear our hair in curls
> We wear no underwear
> We show our pubic hair (Duberman 200–1)

City authorities reacted by decriminalizing Gay bars (at least in theory), and laws against cross-dressing were effectively abolished.

The success of Stonewall was a combination of minimum violence with maximum laughter. Some reporters in the mainstream press helped the cause immensely by portraying *all* of the insurgents as Stonewall Girls: saucy, limp-wristed pansies who relentlessly ridiculed the cops. They wrote up the incident as if it were the performance of a slapstick comedy routine.[24] Police were portrayed as hapless "straight men" to the queeny comedians. *The Daily News*, the largest newspaper in the country at that time, printed an article, "Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Are Stinging Mad":

> Stonewall Inn … was a mecca for the homosexual element in the Village who wanted nothing but a private little place where they could congregate, drink, dance, and do whatever little girls do when they get together…. Then, without warning, Queen Power exploded with all the fury of a gay atomic bomb. Queens, princesses, and ladies-in-waiting began hurling anything they could lay their polished, manicured fingernails on. Bobby pins, compacts, curlers, lipstick tubes and other femme fatale missiles were flying in the direction of the cops. The lilies of the valley had become carnivorous jungle plants…. There were some assorted scratches and bruises, but nothing serious was suffered by these honeys turned Madwomen of Chaillot.[25]

Although it is easy to read the article as a put-down of Gay men and Transgender women, the exaggeration of feminine traits in the insurgents ("Bobby pins, compacts, curlers, lipstick tubes and other femme fatale missiles" instead of rocks, bottles, bricks, and coins) highlights the ineptitude of the police far more than the decadence of the

24. In "Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square" published in *The Village Voice* (July 3, 1969), Lucian Truscott says that the unrest on Saturday was "led by a group of gay cheerleaders…. The scene was a command-performance for queers" (Bloom and Breines 598).

25. The article was written by Jerry Lisker and published on July 6, 1969. Reprinted from a photocopy of the article's first page in *Completely Queer* (Hogan and Hudson 527).

protesters. The article also fails to mention the Gay men, Lesbians, and their Straight allies who the cops beat senseless. Portrayed as buffoons more so than bullies, the police were the butt of the joke.

Americans living in 1969 had been taught that cross-dressing was humorous, witty, and harmless. This was in the early days of television when there were only three channels to choose from: ABC, NBC, and CBS. The nation would watch Milton Berle in drag for laughs on the wildly popular *The Milton Berle Show*. Comedienne Lucille Ball would occasionally dress up like a man on *I Love Lucy*. Larry and Curly of The Three Stooges did drag, as did Bugs Bunny of cartoon fame. Speaking of cartoons, children would grow up laughing at Chip 'n' Dale, the effeminate male chipmunk couple, and the pink theatrical lion Snagglepuss, quite possibly the campiest queen on Saturday morning television. In all of these instances, cross-dressers and effeminate male characters were the heroes.

As angry as the riot police got when taunted, the absurdity of the situation did not escape them or their superiors. Had they *not* considered the protesters silly and basically harmless in their impunity and had the Stonewall Girls been perceived as a real threat, people would surely have been killed. Most likely, however, it would be years before many of those same officers would entertain the idea that just maybe the protesters were *right*.

Walking down Christopher Street in the days after the incident, poet Alan Ginsberg said that homosexuals had "lost that wounded look" that characterized traumatized souls (quoted in Truscott 599). The internal feelings of their own self-hatred that damaged LGBTQ folk could be just as damning and hurtful as the words and actions of their external oppressors. A Gay liberation march was organized a few weeks later. Exactly one year after Stonewall, the first official Gay pride parade was held in Greenwich Village, which was followed by a dance party, the precursor to Circuit parties thrown during Gay pride celebrations.[26]

Stonewall is now enshrined as a pivotal moment in the LGBTQ community's folk history. Lesbians and Gay men quickly went from being socially passive and invisible to politically active, outrageous, and humorous—public responses meant to shake up and undermine the stigma of homosexuality. As displays of self-worth, pride parades are street theater where many LGBTQ folks flaunt their sexuality in the tradition of one angry butch Lesbian, a motley coin-throwing mob, and a chorus line of Stonewall Girls.

26. At least four Pride weekends are also full-fledged Circuit parties: the San Diego Zoo Party, Pensacola Memorial Day, Toronto Prism, and New York Pride. Most Pride celebrations in other major cities include dance parties that are patterned much like Circuit parties.

Commentary: Cory Thorne

St. John's, Newfoundland
January 2008

Growing up in Newfoundland, Canada, I never knew that "gays" lived among us. I remember seeing images of them in the media—drag queens and nearly naked twinks[27] dancing on Church Street during Toronto's Pride weekend—and hearing jokes and utterances of disgust toward them, all of which were used to distance and isolate. Despite my same-sex desires, I quickly learned to fear and reject Gay identity. I might have been homosexual, but I certainly wasn't "gay." Years later when a friend took me to a Gay bar outside of Toledo, Ohio, I suddenly discovered the diversity of identities within the Gay community and began to learn the joy of dance. Dancing with men, for the first time in my life, allowed me to escape my phobias and finally enjoy and understand who I was and where I belonged. I felt, at least temporarily on Saturday nights, that I was part of a community, and that I could be myself, let go on the dance floor, and simply be happy. I also felt isolated, however, during the other six days of the week.

I moved to Philadelphia, and began working toward a PhD in folklore at the University of Pennsylvania. I immediately began going to Gay bars and dances in Philadelphia, and then nearby New York City, Washington, and Rehoboth Beach. Being Gay and dancing became a regular, open, and central part of my life.

I returned to Newfoundland in 2004 for a faculty position in folklore at Memorial University. While the Gay community is still small here, my partner, Stephen, and I continue to go out and dance from time to time. There is only one small Gay bar here, but it helps us deal with the isolation of living in a smaller city and feel like part of a greater community. We also travel whenever possible to larger centers—where we seek out other Gay bars to dance in, to help keep our spirits alive.

I've always been amazed by the many ways in which identity is performed on the dance floor—butch, femme, voyeur, machismo, working class, prissy, professional, confident, confused, narcissistic…. Of course, the images vary according to the context, but the performance of identity, whether it be the hyper-masculine leather daddy or the campiest princess in fairyland, is exactly that—a coded performance that marks insider/outsider status within a space that is open to exploration and negotiation of individual and group identity. It is a space that is often

27. A "twink" is a thin young man.

achieved through non-verbal communication, in an attempt to express feelings and desires that are otherwise difficult to describe and, for many, to understand.

Dance is a performance that takes us into the carnivalesque. It helps suspend time, to examine the extreme and, at times, the absurd, so that we can better understand and negotiate the real and the necessary. It is also a type of release, both for people who are closeted within professional or family settings and for people who are open, yet subject to rules and social expectations that run counter to core identity. The Stonewall riots themselves are often described as a type of release, where the playful performance of sexuality accidentally escaped the dance floor, thanks to the NYPD boys in blue. Through this release, rules are not merely broken, but they are transformed and they are owned.

Through the communal performance of identity, within spaces dedicated to Queer identities, we achieve a sense of communitas—a deeper sense of community that allows us to reenter the Straight world without the same level of fear of hatred, violence, or discrimination. It means that I can smile when someone says that I'm "queer."

During research on Philadelphia's Blue Ball and Gay space,[28] I observed the role of dance and the Circuit in creating temporal Gay spaces within typically non-sexualized places and places perceived as potentially homophobic (30th Street Train Station, the Navy Yard in south Philly, Reading Terminal, all venues for the Blue Ball Main Event). Blue Ball helped transform Gay space from isolated and hidden subversive places into acceptable and integral parts of everyday life in Philadelphia. I saw how dance could be used to create Gay positive space that, although temporary, allowed Philadelphia's Gay community to better establish itself as an open and explicit part of the city. Dance became a tool for making the Gay community more public, for increasing the sense of community within the city, and for connecting this community to the even larger Gay community of the Circuit.

28. Co-written with Stephen Reynolds, 2001. "Ambiguously Pink and Amazingly Blue: The Emergence of *Gay* Tourism in Philadelphia." Presented at the American Culture Association/Popular Culture Association National Meeting in Philadelphia.

Chapter 8

A History of the Circuit(s): 1969 CE–Present

You have to understand.
Dancing is what our people do.

—Jeffrey Sanker, producer of White Party Palm Springs

Just as there was a circuit of drag balls in the eastern part of the United States during the 1930s, so were there annual Gay events before Stonewall. But it is a bit of a stretch to consider any of them Circuit parties because of some features that came into existence only after Stonewall.

Some of the distinguishing characteristics are as follows: large-scale, semi-public, annual theme parties dedicated strictly to dance; sound and light technologies that were perfected during the disco era (1972–1981); the rise of the DJ-as-star and the art of "mixing" songs in an unbroken series; display of the shirtless male body on the dance floor; a fondness for over-the-top decoration, special effects, and staged performances while participants are dancing; and the tendency for festivities to go from Friday until Sunday.

The major impetus for the formation of the Circuit was the need for public intimacy that need not be sexual. Circuit parties are not orgies, although Black Parties thrown in places such as NYC and Amsterdam have special areas set aside for just that purpose, and sexual behavior might occur on the dance floor during almost any event. The early Circuit needed privacy in order to generate an environment where Gay men could get intoxicated, flirt, display their physiques, and find romance—all in a safe space where they made their own rules.

Bill Haberkam and JustCircuit, www.justcircuit.com

Accessorizing markers of masculinity: construction-crew dancers for performance artist Circuit Mom on the Friday event of Chicago Fireball 2003, held in an old steel mill.

After Stonewall: Sex, Sex, Sex

Stonewall was a sexual bugle call for homosexual men across the country.

Immediately following Stonewall, there was a marked increase in public sexual activity, especially in NYC. No longer in its infancy, the young Gay movement rushed into undisciplined puberty as men claimed new sexual territories throughout Manhattan, legal and otherwise. The dark forest of "the Rambles" in Central Park and the large empty warehouses on abandoned West Side piers became erotic zones laden with potential thrills and real danger. Queer-bashers would seek victims there. The warehouses were full of safety hazards that could lead to injury or even death as men fell through holes in the floor, sometimes into the Hudson River.[1]

But the chance of physical harm did little to prevent visitors from going there at all hours—perhaps danger and a sense of adventure

1. Joseph Lovett's documentary, *Gay Sex in the 70s*, admirably covers the excesses of those times.

made the lure of the forbidden even more enticing. Trucks at the piers became pitch-black "back rooms" as men would pack into their trailers once the sun went down. The notoriety of the West Side piers and the trucks parked there resonated in the sexual culture of Gay male communities. Washington, D.C. had an immensely popular Gay club called the Pier, and Man's Country bathhouse in Manhattan had a full-sized model of a truck on its ninth floor (Loughery 360–62).

Anonymous sex was available at a glance. Venereal diseases such as gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis-B, and intestinal parasites were rampant. It would be unfair to say that all of this was a result of Gay liberation only; the sexual revolution had already ushered in a rise in STDs before Stonewall. A 1964 study by the New York Academy of Medicine blamed the increase on several factors including the automobile, the feminist movement, a breakdown in family values, and homosexuals who wanted same-sex love "recognized as a noble way of life" (Kaiser 150). No doubt, the Gay male community's newfound liberation after Stonewall aggravated the problem.[2]

The rise in venereal disease infections did not prevent men from cruising each other (looking for sex) everywhere they could, including the free clinic treating them for sexually transmitted diseases. Far from discouraging sex, STDs were often dismissed with a shrug—everything had a cure. Mel Cheren describes the prevailing attitude:

> Most of us were not particularly worried at the time. In fact, our biggest complaint was that something nasty usually meant that you were not supposed to have sex until it cleared up, which might be several weeks. When you were used to having sex with somebody new almost every day, or even several times a day, it was tough to be told that you had to take a few weeks off. (Cheren 272)

For those who wanted a degree of comfort and security when they went out hunting for sex, many Gay bars had back rooms for sexual encounters, and bathhouses were set up to cater exclusively to Gay men.[3] Some of them, such as the Club chain of bathhouses (started in 1965 in Cleveland, Ohio), were homosexual-friendly establishments that

2. In *Sexual Ecology*, Dr. June Osborn of the National Institute of Health is quoted in 1980 as saying, "Every time we do an NIH site visit, the definition of 'multiple sex partners' has changed.… First it was twenty partners a year. That was 1975. Then in 1976 it was fifty partners a year. By 1978, we were talking about a hundred sexual partners a year and now we're using the term to describe five hundred partners in a single year.… I am … duly in awe" (Rotello 62–63).

3. Gay bathhouses existed well before 1969 but were usually seen by authorities as illegal businesses that could be shut down at any time. Stonewall helped the bathhouse industry become a legally valid institution that would be threatened again by the AIDS epidemic and consequential public panic.

were respectable, clean, and discreet. In Manhattan, the Continental Baths (which opened in 1968) and the St. Marks Baths were stylish health spas featuring live performances. "My career took off when I sang at the Continental Baths in New York," Bette Midler said in 1972 (Loughery 359–60). Midler performed there with Barry Manilow at the piano (Kaiser 248), thus earning her nickname, "Bathhouse Betty" (she released an album with the same name in 1998). Singers Melba Moore, Cab Calloway, Tiny Tim, and comedian Dick Gregory also performed at the Continental Baths (Loughery 360).

Early 1970s: The First Circuit (The Manhattan-Fire Island Loop)

The history of the Circuit is actually a history of interrelated *circuits*. The first Circuit is the seasonal movement of Gay men from discos in Manhattan to dance clubs on Fire Island during the summer; it began in the early 1970s almost immediately after Stonewall. The second Circuit is the movement of men from city to city across the United States to attend Manhattan-inspired *Circuit parties*[4] in the late 1970s.

Manhattan (and its Fire Island refuge) is the cradle of Gay men's dance culture, fashion, and festival. It is the historic epicenter of American theater, the home of Broadway/off-Broadway, and the arts associated with theater, such as choreography, sets, and technologies for spectacle. Because of its visibility, New York City rather than San Francisco, pre-Nazi Berlin, or any other large metropolis, was responsible for ushering in the age of public awareness of Gay folk as a people rather than simply a deviant group of criminals, sinners, and the mentally ill.

Just as Stonewall cannot be separated from illegal and scandalous activities, including unlicensed alcohol sales and cross-dressing, Gay liberation in its initial stages was fueled by illegal drugs and funded by shirtless dancing men. One of the first organizations to form after Stonewall was the Gay Liberation Front, a politically aware activist group with a reputation for using marijuana and acid (Clendinen and Nagourney 46). In July of 1969, the GLF opened Alternate U, its own school for political debate and community awareness in an industrial loft on Fourteenth Street. Tired of going to bars owned by Straight people who were not always sympathetic to Gay folk, the GLF began holding dances in December for the Gay community. These dances drew both men and women.[5]

4. It is during the second Circuit that the term "circuit party" becomes popular.
5. In April 1970, the GLF women organized the first women-only dances as alternatives to the overwhelming numbers of men at most Gay liberation functions (Teal 42).

Another group, the Gay Activists Alliance, began holding fundraiser dances in May 1971. Like the GLF, the GAA used its facilities, an abandoned firehouse on Wooster Street, for committee meetings and social gatherings, complete with strobe lights, coat check, and occasionally, go-go boys (Teal 41–42, Clendinen and Nagourney 76). The bay for fire trucks was spacious and packed with mostly Gay men. For a time, it was New York's most popular Gay male dance venue. Clendinen and Nagourney describe a scene that is strikingly familiar to Circuit boys and girls today:

> On any Saturday night, people would take in the expanse of men, over a thousand of them, shirtless, shoulder to shoulder, arms flying in the air, high on LSD or [Q]uaaludes or Seconals or black beauties or marijuana. They were pounding sneakers on the cement floor, under flashing colored and strobe lights, and to a sound system "that the Fillmore might envy," as Randy Wicker wrote in *Gay* newspaper, referring to the rock and roll concert hall across town … it was to be the progenitor of the huge discos that later appeared in New York. Suddenly, politics was glamorous. People who never thought of going to a GAA Thursday night meeting or a zap[6] would line up to dance in what was by day the headquarters of the most active gay rights group in the country and by night New York's premier gay club. (76–77)

Randy Wicker's words are almost prophetic. In only a few years, the Fillmore East would become the Saint, the most famous Gay male dance club in history.

The Gay men's dance movement would soon leave political activism to explore a privately constructed Gay identity. Dance clubs opened in Manhattan that catered exclusively to Gay men, who then began developing their own post-Stonewall culture away from the public eye.

The insistence on privacy and segregation from women and Straight men should not be seen as contrary to Gay liberation. Rather, it was *a result of* Gay liberation. The Gay men's dance movement could not have occurred without the confidence and pride that Gay men felt as a consequence of Stonewall. "One of the profound changes wrought by Gay liberation," states Michael Bronski, "was the permission granted to Gay men to like themselves" (103). But before Gay men could like themselves, they needed to get to know each other, on their own terms and in their own venues.

Initially, the term "circuit" referred to the weekly calendar for Gay men in-the-know (called "circuit queens"[7]) to visit Gay-friendly hair

6. Disruptive, unannounced protests (Hogan and Hudson 595).
7. The earliest reference to circuit queens I can find is in *Dancer from the Dance* (Holleran 152).

salons, restaurants, bars, dance clubs, and bathhouses on Manhattan Island that were considered *chic* (Levine 60). It would also include the seasonal pilgrimage to Fire Island in the summer and the newly legal clubs in Manhattan during the off-season. This inter-island pilgrimage made up the first post-Stonewall dance circuit. Andrew Holleran describes the migratory pattern of these early Circuit participants in his novel, *Dancer from the Dance*:

> We would not stop dancing. We moved with the regularity of the Pope from the city to Fire Island in the summer, where we danced till the fall; and then, like the geese flying south, the butterflies dying in the dunes, we found some new place in Manhattan and danced all winter there. (111)

Manhattan clubs became progressively more grand and exclusive. Venues such as the Loft, 12 West, Flamingo, Salvation, Paradise Garage, and the Saint have become legendary landmarks in LGBTQ history. These clubs nurtured a new Gay dance culture that would change the face of popular dance music and club culture around the world.

The first huge Gay dance space was the Sanctuary, a converted German Baptist church on West Forty-third Street that opened in 1971. The DJ booth sat where the altar had been, and the pornographic and pagan imagery filled the space (Cheren 102). Another space dedicated to religious inversion was Salvation (located, appropriately, in Hell's Kitchen, as was the Sanctuary), which featured a grand portrait of Satan, served drinks in chalices, and had pews lining the walls (Collin 11).[8] But Gay male dance clubs as anti-church soon fell out of fashion.

A smaller, more exclusive space was the Loft at 647 Broadway, a racially-inclusive private club that was actually the big loft apartment belonging to David Mancuso who transformed it into a dance venue for the entire weekend. Featuring free food and a great sound system, the Loft was a weekend retreat. It was a second home for "Loft babies" who were invited to join since Mancuso opened his doors in 1970 (Silcott 20). The Loft did not serve liquor, which meant that there was no need for a liquor license (12 West, Flamingo, and the Saint would do the same) and it could stay open as long as it wanted. The high point for an evening of dancing at the Loft moved from the hour before midnight to 6:00 in the morning, marking a shift from late evening-early morning parties to marathon dance sessions at all

8. The name "Salvation" has survived in the Gay male club scene, first in Miami, which had a legendary club by the same name, and in the Salvation parties thrown in Britain and other European countries. Repetition of names is a common occurrence. In Columbus, Ohio, two of its clubs were named after Manhattan venues: 7 West and the Garage.

hours that could go on for more than one day, a shift that was fueled by intoxicants other than alcohol.

As well as continuously mixing one song into the next, DJs learned to play the music according to the intoxicants of choice. Howard Merritt, a DJ at the Flamingo, would call drug dealers and ask them, "What's been your big seller this week?":

> Then I would know what kind of music to play that weekend. If they sold more mda [sic], the music had to be more high energy. Cocaine and speed, that's the kind of music I played. But if they sold a lot of [angel] dust [PCP], then people weren't coming to hear me. (Cheren 163)

One tradition that can be traced back to these times (or possibly even further back) is color-themed parties. The Flamingo had them in the 1970s. White, Black, and Red Parties would become staples of more than one club and eventually more than one city as Gay Manhattan club culture spread.[9] Today, many cities still have Black Parties and White Parties, but only a few are widely regarded as Circuit events, such as the White Parties in Palm Springs, Miami, and formerly, New York, and the Black Parties in New York and Amsterdam. Other colors have made their debut as well, with the Philadelphia Blue Ball, Montreal Black and Blue, Dallas Purple Party, and Amsterdam Orange Ball.

Just as the isle of Manhattan sprouted a host of openly-Gay dance venues after Stonewall, so did Fire Island. The disco song "Fire Island" by the all-male and orientation-ambiguous Village People gives some of the club names:

> It's the place where you'll find me, the sun and sea
> the place where love is free, yeah
> We can scream, but let's sing
> we can do each other's thing, yeah
> Groove at the Ice Palace
> Get on down at the Monster
> Raise hell, raise hell
> Chasin' tail at the Blue Whale
> Peckin', I'm peckin'
> peckin' at the Sandpiper
> Pumpin', I'm pumpin'
> pumpin' at the hotel
> Fire Island—it's a funky weekend
> a funky funky weekend
> Don't go in the bushes, someone might grab ya
> Don't go in the bushes, someone might stab ya

9. So far, I have heard of 1970s color-themed parties in New York, Columbus (Ohio), Boston, and San Francisco.

The presence of venues such as the Ice Palace, Monster, Blue Whale, and Sandpiper on a barrier island with an off-season population of only a few thousand gives some indication of how popular Fire Island was during the summer. The fact that this song also refers to violence indicates that there was still uneasiness brought on by random Gay-bashing in this sun-and-fun Gay resort.

The issue of building a nonconformist "butch" or "manly" masculinity became important in Gay discourse, expression, and fashion immediately after Stonewall. In part, this was a conscious move by Gay men to protect themselves from attack, to repel would-be aggressors with visible signs of physical strength and macho behavior. More importantly, it was also a means of erotic attraction, to beautify the body by clothing it in muscle and catch the eye of other Gay men. Plenty of men were ready to transform their bodies and attitudes.

This change in masculine expression marks a pivotal moment in LGBTQ history: effeminacy was no longer necessary as a key marker for homosexuality. Unlike molly houses or drag balls, clubs in the Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit openly celebrated muscular and manly Gay men, who would appear on the streets and the beach by the thousands. At night, they would take off their shirts in the clubs in a display of raw sensuality and assertiveness that shocked the awareness of anyone who witnessed them *en masse*. Gay men made themselves the objects of their own desire rather than wistfully lusting after some Straight masculine ideal. This ushered the age of the "Gay clone," a mustached, nicely muscled stud made famous (and gently ridiculed) by the song "Macho Man" by the Village People:

Body, it's so hot, my body
Body, love to pop my body
Body, love to please my body
Body, don't you tease my body
Body, you'll adore my body
Body, come explore my body
Body, made by God, my body
Body, it's so good, my body
You can tell a macho, he has a funky walk
His western shirts and leather, always look so boss
Funky with his body, he's a king
Call him Mister Eagle,[10] dig his chains
You can best believe that, he's a macho man
Likes to be the leader, he never dresses grand
Hey! Hey! Hey, hey, hey!

10. The Eagle is a chain of Gay Leather bars, where clothing made of leather, harnesses, and chains would be acceptable attire.

Macho, macho man
I've got to be, a macho man
Macho, macho man
I've got to be a macho!

The deeply internalized stereotypes of homosexuals as nelly fags (effeminate men) or sneaky perverts were challenged on and off the dance floor by the hypermasculinity of the Gay clone. For the general public, however, effeminate stereotypes were still the rule.

Effeminacy in the Gay male community did not disappear with the rise of the macho man. Cherished nelly traditions going back to the days of the molly houses survived quite well in the first Circuit. Men still gave each other girl names. Hilarious effeminate behavior in the form of camp was regularly interwoven in men's performance of the Gay male identity, including the performance of muscular clones.

The influence of the original Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit spread and became standard behavior outside of NYC as visitors flocked there and brought Circuit culture back home with them. In response to DJs in the Gay dance scene and the popularity of the music they made, record companies produced extended-play versions of dance songs, technicians improved turntables, and clubs invested heavily in lights and sound equipment.[11] All of these innovations contributed to a new industry dedicated to developing and enhancing techniques of communal ecstasy.

Gay club culture quickly spread beyond the Gay community into the mainstream with the popularity of disco music in the 1970s. The influence of the Gay men's dance movement on disco can be seen in the disco scene's relaxed attitude toward drugs[12] and sensual dance floor expression in clubs like Studio 54. This included, a more tolerant attitude toward Gay people.

One musical group stood out above the rest as the kings of disco and the ambassadors of Gay male club sensibilities in the late '70s: the Village People.[13] Made up of six physically-fit, male singers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, the Village People strutted

11. This is also the beginning of the technology that would be used to create disco and house culture.
12. Although there is some continuity between the Flower Power movement and disco culture, I do not believe that such continuity was responsible for the remarkable tolerance toward illegal drugs unless one considers the way such tolerance was preserved within the Gay community and passed on to disco by that community, along with technologies for dance.
13. Even the name "Village People" is evocative of Greenwich Village in Manhattan, the neighborhood in which Stonewall took place. Besides "Fire Island" and "Macho Man," their repertoire includes tongue-in-cheek titles and lyrics of songs such as "YMCA," "In the Navy," "San Francisco," and "Sodom and Gomorrah."

onstage and danced as they sang, a fusion of theatrical chorus line and pop music with a dash of burlesque. They dressed up as masculine icons: Indian, Cowboy, Biker, Construction Worker, Soldier, and Cop.[14] The coded lyrics to their songs are hilarious and full of sexual innuendos that would not always register in the minds of most Straights, but were easily understood by Gay men. There was one thing that the Village People would not do, however. They would not perform in an effeminate manner. From the perspective of the Gay male community, the Village People were a band of butch Gay brothers who undermined the stereotype of the flaming queen. They were the harbinger of the muscular, macho Circuit boy.

However, heterosexuals could interpret those same macho mannerisms in a very different way. The Straight community assumed that maybe the Village People were not *really* Gay because of the absence of effeminate behavior. Uptight Straight Americans could accept the Village People with open arms, as long they could assure themselves that the group was a clever joke. The Village People themselves would not say for certain on whose team they played, no matter how obvious their affiliation appeared to Gay folk. In fact, they were careful to encourage ambiguity. They portrayed themselves as sexy, possibly Straight, fun-loving dudes in costume *and* as living symbols of Gay men's resistance to the pansy stereotype.

It would be a mistake for LGBTQ historians to assume that the Village People were simply closet cases or cheap parodies—they were so much more. I personally doubt they could have been as effective in lowering the barriers between Gay and Straight if they had all been out-and-out Gay, or if they had identified only as Straight. When they danced in their butch outfits and sang with strong masculine voices in front of Straight audiences, these six men contributed to the liberation of Gay people in much the same way as the Stonewall Girls, who danced in feminine drag and sang in front of riot police. The Indian, Cowboy, Biker, Construction Worker, Soldier, and Cop inspired the world to have fun with sexual identity and follow Gay sensibilities of hilarity, tolerance, sensuality, and nonviolence. They confronted America with macho muscle, teased its citizens, and dared them to laugh.

Nevertheless, the Village People could push, but only so hard before homophobic America pushed back.

14. The use of masculine icons was the rejection of nelly sensibilities. In their incarnation of Gay identity, the Village People accessorized masculine occupations as symbols of eroticized Gay manliness rather than projected onto Straight men.

Disco Sucks!

Any hopes of Gays and Straights forming a united club culture based on Gay values were short-lived. Thinly-veiled homophobic backlash contributed to the "death" of disco in the late 1970s. "Disco Sucks" and "Kill Disco" were common slogans in a time when beating up Queers was still a popular sport among bored Straight jocks. Chicago radio DJ Steve Dahl called for a "disco destruction army" to verbally assault DJs that played disco music. In one publicity stunt, Dahl gave away 100 tickets to a Village People concert so that disco-haters could harass the performers. "Macho Man" was no longer a laughing matter. "Disco music is a disease," Dahl warned his minions as he called for the extinction of the genre, which he characterized as a plague (Brewster and Broughton 268). Such language and its underlying edge of hatred would soon be used in describing GRID (Gay-Related Immunity Deficiency, an early name for AIDS).

On July 12, 1979 (three weeks after Stonewall's tenth anniversary), Dahl pulled his biggest anti-disco stunt: he supervised a Disco Demolition rally at Chicago's Comiskey Park during a baseball double-header between the Detroit Tigers and the Chicago White Sox. After the first game, Dahl (in paramilitary gear) went on the field and burned several thousand disco albums that fans had brought in exchange for reduced admission. The album-burning excited the White teenage spectators into a frenzy. Thousands of them poured onto the field, ripped up the turf, set more fires, and started fights while chanting "Disco Sucks!" (Brewster and Broughton 269, Schulman 74, Vincent 215).

One of the reasons why Gay men were feared was because they, too, sucked and perversely enjoyed sucking. Mel Cheren, "Godfather of Disco" and founder of West End Records, sums up the backlash:

> The music market is largely a zero-sum game, so as disco rose, everything else had to fall. This infuriated those who had dominated music for years—rock critics, DJs, and producers, and lots of disenfranchised fans. Rock had defined two generations of white, middle-class straight baby-boomers, particularly guys. It spoke to them and for them, and now it was in danger of being relegated to a niche market itself by a new style dominated by black musicians and Gay promoters, producers, and tastemakers. As the disco sweep turned into a tidal wave, a near panic set in. Beneath the bitter complaints that disco was mindless, hedonistic, repetitive, pounding—exactly what critics had said about rock itself in its early years—there was this deeper complaint: disco was black and Hispanic. Disco was mindless and gay. Disco sucked. (245)

Irrational hatred of disco was not limited to Chicago—it became political and international in scope. Like homosexuality, disco was portrayed as a threat to public health and national security. According to Brewster and Broughton,

> All over the world, the disco menace was confronted; right-wing Americans denounced it as morally degraded and probably a form of communist mind control; communist countries banned it as decadent and capitalist. Perhaps the most bizarre expression of antidisco sentiment came from Turkey, where scientists at the University of Ankara "proved" that disco turned pigs deaf and made mice homosexual. (Brewster and Broughton 269)

The anti-disco crusade had a racist edge. Disco was not only perceived as Gay by Straight White rockers, it was also non-White. There were not many African American folk (if any) in Dahl's "disco destruction army," and for good reason.

Homophobia in Hip-Hop today may be seen in part as Straight Black men's parallel reaction against disco, a means of distancing Black musical culture from Gay-influenced music that sucked. Black backlash framed disco as White and assimilationist (Schulman 74). The rise of rap music occurred at about the same time as disco-bashing. Mildly homophobic lyrics are present in the very first rap hit, "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugar Hill Gang in which Superman is described as a fairy who flies around in panty hose, and rivals are labeled "sucker MCs."

Nevertheless, rap music owes a debt to disco. "Rapper's Delight" was created when the Sugar Hill Gang sampled a non-vocal version of a disco hit called "Good Times" by Chic and chanted their own lyrical poetry to it.

Disco music survived (often called *urban music* to avoid the backlash) and flourished in the Gay male community. Disco would eventually transform seamlessly into *house* music. By the time disco had supposedly died, the first generation of the Circuit was already well established. With ever-present threats of Gay-bashing and incidences like the anti-disco riot of 1979, the Gay men's dance movement had plenty of incentive to keep itself removed from the general public.

Even though it was concealed from the public eye, this first Circuit had a huge effect on Gay men's perception of themselves across the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe. The early Gay male scene in post-Stonewall Manhattan was embryonic and fragile, protected from harm's way in social spaces that catered to Gay men only, at least in its first couple of years.[15]

15. The same need for privacy can be found in the women's music festival movement. Many women's music festivals are women-only spaces. Sometimes a community

Once the Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit began expanding to other cities at the end of the '70s, two Manhattan clubs would set the pace for years to come: the Saint and the Paradise Garage.

1980–1985: The Shining Glory of the Saint

While the first Circuit was going strong, the super-club called the Saint was built. Like the Flamingo and other popular venues, it was for members only (a limited number of guests were allowed). The Saint could easily hold a few thousand revelers and had one of the most sophisticated sound and light systems for its time. If the Stonewall Inn was the bottom of the barrel for nightclubs, the Saint was the top of the line. Many people who remember the early days claim that the Saint represented everything grand about the Circuit.

The invitation for membership that the Saint's creator/owner Bruce Mailman had sent out to his friends indicates that Mailman didn't design the club to generate a purely secular experience:

> Since the beginning of recorded history the male members of the species have joined together in ritual dance. Adorned, semi-naked with rhythm instruments, they used this tribal rite to celebrate their Gods and themselves. The Saint has been created to perform the mystery—to continue the rite. (Clendinen and Nagourney 442)

Club culture tends to be geographically volatile. The opening of the Saint contributed to the demise of the Flamingo, formerly the "only" place to go. We still see this dynamic today in every major city, as notoriously fickle Gay men flock to the latest flavor of club venues and leave old clubs in financial ruin.

The Saint (opened in 1980, closed in 1988) is a topic of Gay men's folklore that borders on the mythical. DJ Warren Gluck said that the Saint was all about creating a rich aesthetic and transcendental experience. "When you stepped onto the dance floor, you walked into the music," he said (interview, December 2002). On certain weekends, the Saint's crowd would dance from Saturday night to Monday morning. By 1980, the pattern for the then-embryonic Circuit had been set. Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton (*Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*) describe it thus:

> The Saint's dancefloor [sic] would be a mass of bodies, each sculpted to perfection, moving in tribal unison. To the strains of the club's ornate music, these beautiful men would proceed to get utterly trashed—on angel dust [PCP], Quaaludes, ecstasy, cocaine, amphetamines. They were Greek gods with drug habits. (197)

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needs privacy so that its members can determine for themselves who they are, what they want, and how they choose to behave.

The Saint took its name from the St. Marks Baths—also owned by Bruce Mailman—which took its name from St. Marks Place, the street on which it is located. In turn, St. Marks Place took *its* name from St. Mark's-on-the-Bowery, a church located a couple of blocks north on East Tenth Street.

The building that became the Saint (105 Second Avenue) had formerly been the Fillmore East, a theater in which many '60s rock musicians had performed.[16] After a five million dollar facelift, complete with a state-of-the-art sound system, DJ equipment, and light fixtures including a planetarium projector, the Saint was truly a heavenly place to dance. A huge dome hung over the dance floor; the lights and planetarium played upon its surface. People who had gone to the Saint in its heyday said that no club could come close to it in style and sophistication.

People also remember the Saint as holy ground. Brewster and Broughton quote an unnamed clubber: "It was the headiest experience I've ever had in my life.... And it is unrivaled still. It was liberating, spiritually uplifting. That's where I learned to love my brothers" (196).

It had its flaws, however. The Saint would not initially let women in for any reason whatsoever (the more democratic Paradise Garage would admit women, but only in small numbers). Unlike Stonewall, it was a refuge only for those who could afford membership or were sponsored by members. Its sophistication came with a price tag. But considering that the Gay club scene was occasionally targeted by crazed homophobes and drug use was a given,[17] it was not entirely without reason that these clubs were so exclusive. In my own experience (as recently as 1998), I can remember when Gay dance clubs in Columbus, Ohio, had no signs in front to prevent random acts of violence against their clientele.

Besides being celestial in sound and sight, the Saint also catered to the sexual appetites of its male patrons. A balcony that looked down on the dance floor was the place to have sex between dances. In *My Life and the Paradise Garage*, a book about the origins of the Gay dance club scene, Mel Cheren describes the infamous balcony:

16. The Fillmore East was named after the Fillmore, a dance hall-turned-concert hall in San Francisco. Both Fillmores were under the direction of promoter Bill Graham, who closed them in 1971. Before the Fillmore, it was the Loews Commodore, and before that, it belonged to a Yiddish theater troupe (Clendinen and Nagourney 442).

17. Several Gay Manhattan dance clubs did not sell liquor before the advent of AIDS because it was not the intoxicant of choice. Since liquor was not sold, there was no need to get a liquor license.

> From the grand balcony you would gaze at the constellations of stars on the immense planetarium, the dance floor pulsing below…. Most of the men on the balcony were not really there for the view, however…. The balcony was essentially a big orgy room, and for most guests a trip up to the balcony became almost obligatory. On a typical night you might spend a couple of hours dancing, and then, high as a kite, you'd zip up to the balcony for a quickie…. Then after trysting up there in heaven, and smoking a dusted joint [marijuana laced with PCP] or snorting some coke, you'd come back down to the dance floor for another round. The balcony changed everything about the disco experience, and, in my opinion, not for the better. The definition of a good night ceased being whether you had danced yourself into delirium, but whether you had scored. (Cheren 278)

DJ Wendy Hunt mentions the Saint's balcony:

> Back in the day, I was one of the very few female members of the Saint, and was even jealous, at times, of the guys who could go to the area of the club where sex took place. I was even told at the door, "Please do not go there" because it was a forbidden area for women. I never really stopped to think of what I'd do once there, being penisless and all, because I really did feel like part of the tribe! (interview, December 2007)

The apparent incongruity between the Saint's name and the libertine atmosphere of the balcony is not unique in the history of Gay sexual geography. It reflects a fondness for wordplay, irony, and scandalous speech. This is apparent from the very beginning of the first Circuit, with clubs such as the Flamingo ("flaming" refers to a Gay man who exaggerates the behavior of the opposite sex; flamingos are usually portrayed as pink), the Sanctuary, Salvation, and Paradise Garage. These names reflect common themes of sensuality, hilarity, and the sacred in Gay men's dance culture.

The undisciplined sexual openness of the Saint and tolerance of intoxicants did not mean, however, that anything was permissible. Members expected guests to maintain a high level of etiquette. Cigarettes and drinks were forbidden on the dance floor. Members had no problem telling offenders point blank to follow the rules or leave.

Both the Saint and St. Marks Baths were among the best in their respective genres. They blurred the distinctions between bathhouses and dance clubs. Just as the Saint had its balcony for quick encounters, St. Marks sometimes had dance music for the benefit of its clientele.[18]

In terms of age, the bathhouse came before the mega-club. St. Marks Baths was built on the same site as the last city residence of James

18. It is not unusual for bathhouses to play dance music or to employ live DJs.

Lynn McStatts, www.personalpaparazziatl.com

DJ Wendy Hunt at Pensacola Memorial Day Pool Party at the Hampton Inn

Fenimore Cooper. It opened as a bathhouse in 1913 and was named the St. Marks Russian and Turkish Baths. The property was bought by Mailman in 1979, renovated and renamed the New St. Marks Baths.

There is a long tradition of interdependence between the Circuit and bathhouses. Major holidays and Circuit parties tend to bring brisk business to "the tubs." Besides acting as venues for sexual encounters, bathhouses also act as centers for socializing, safe havens for men to come down off of their intoxicants, and a cheaper alternative to a hotel room so that revelers could clean up and get a few hours of sleep. Of course, the bathhouse is also a prime spot for further display of the body.

Getting Churchy in the Paradise Garage (1977–1987)

In contrast (and, in many ways, in conjunction) with the Saint, there was its funkier African-Latino counterpart, the Paradise Garage. The Garage was just that, a renovated garage on 84 King St.

Characterized by Cheren as "the ultimate tribal dance space," the Garage took much of its inspiration from the Loft. Like the Loft, the Flamingo, and the Saint, the Paradise Garage was invitation-only. It would open on Friday and Saturday nights, and close whenever people went home. Like the Loft, the Garage was a home away from home. Lockers were provided, as was free food and places where one could take a quick nap. For a refreshing change of environment, there was a rooftop terrace. Larry Levan and Richard Long designed the sound system to enhance the treble and bass with extra features such as "tweeter arrays" and special low-end subwoofers known as "Larry's horn" (Silcott 20).

Although the Garage could not match the Saint in sheer splendor, it was at least as sophisticated (and arguably better) in sound production, in no small part due to the expertise of its resident DJ, Larry Levan. The Garage and Levan are enshrined in underground music culture as, according to Brewster and Broughton, "the crucial link between disco and the musical forms which evolved from it":

> Here a young DJ, Larry Levan, exemplified his profession's new possibilities—consolidating the club DJ's new role as producer, remixer and commercially powerful tastemaker. Levan showed just how much creative control a DJ could exercise, and with one of the most devoted and energetic groups of clubbers ever, used the Garage to preserve and amplify much of disco's original underground spirit. In doing this he … grew to enjoy such a passionate relationship with the people on his dancefloor [sic] that they worshipped him more or less as a god…. Today, Larry Levan is regularly hailed as the world's greatest ever DJ, and his club elevated to mythic status whenever it is mentioned. (271–72)

Levan's mixture of old classics with new music, his willingness to play songs that other DJs were afraid to touch, and his tendency to send lyrical messages to the dance floor became known as "disco evangelism" (Cheren 182).

The cult of the DJ was an integral part of the Garage's design. Cheren describes the Garage DJ booth and its premier occupant:

> The Garage had the ultimate booth, with one area reserved for the DJ himself, and another more spacious area with couches and tables where the DJ's entourage would gather. The whole thing was generally tightly guarded by a security man, and for many disco fans the ultimate sign that you had arrived was the day you were invited, or allowed, into the booth. Like any hierarchy, booths had a source of supreme power—the DJ—surrounded by a court and an entourage as serious in its own way as the royal courts of old, with its own etiquette,

> including rewards for the faithful and punishment the disloyal. Usually banishment.... And in the middle of it all was the mad king who ruled this strange court: La Diva Levan. (304–5)

If the Saint was the place for the Gay male community's elite in terms of money and looks, the Garage was the home of its dance masters, who flocked to witness the innovative DJ techniques of Levan. "There was no attitude here," says Cheren about the Garage's clientele, "no cliques defined by their muscles, no fashion victims, no A-list" (198). Mireille Silcott calls the Paradise Garage, "a two-thousand capacity haven from prejudice, a decompression zone, not a place to pose or to have sex in backrooms, but a place to *dance*" (20).[19] DJ Johnny Dynell recalls the reverence people had for the Garage: "It's very Old Testament. And for everyone there, it really was a temple. It was sacred ground" (Brewster and Broughton 272).

The culture of the DJ was fine tuned in the Saint, the Paradise Garage, and other Gay clubs in New York. These venues were important sites in the transformation of a night of music into a journey, a rhythmic voyage that took the dancers to uncharted psychic, erotic, and spiritual territories. The rapport that DJs enjoy with their crowds in the Circuit has its genesis in these clubs. As the Ur-spaces of the club experience, the Saint and Garage were the pace setters, oases for Gay men all over the world.

Late 1970s: The Birth of the Circuit Party

Born from the pattern set by the original Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit, a second-generation circuit of parties (that would be called "circuit parties" for the first time) across the United States began in the early 1980s. Circuit parties generated a coast-to-coast nomadic community with its own music, DJs, and social calendar. The movement started when men who had gone to Manhattan and Fire Island brought dance culture, DJs, and technology to their home cities. Some Circuit veterans say that this new, more geographically diverse Circuit began in Columbus, Ohio, when an artist/club owner named Corbett Reynolds started the Red Party in 1976.

In terms of Gay men traveling from party to party, it is probable that a hidden circuit of parties was already in place for much of the twentieth century. These events would coincide with already-established traditions and celebrations of major holidays and festivals such

19. Rave culture and underground dance culture in general has elevated Larry Levan to the status of godhood. One reason for this could be the ambience of the Paradise Garage, which was not a place for sex, neither was it a refuge for the elite and the untouchably beautiful. Its inclusiveness would definitely appeal to those who follow the PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity, Respect) ethic of the Rave community.

as Halloween and New Year's in large urban centers. There were annual events that predate the Red Party, such as the previously mentioned Emma Jones party in Pensacola (1966–1974), Mardi Gras, and New Orleans Southern Decadence (1971). Some argue that the second Circuit began with Atlanta's annual Hotlanta River Expo, also started in 1976. Reynolds, however, said that Hotlanta got its inspiration from the Red.

The Red Party can be considered the first Circuit party because it did the following early on: emphasized pageantry, transferred the party from a club to a larger rented space, imported Manhattan club sensibilities (performers, DJs, and technologies for light and sound), and relegated dance as the basis for the gathering, not simply one activity among many.

The Red was a Columbus tradition, much like a Gay homecoming. It began in a bar that Reynolds owned called Rudely Elegant. He would throw annual parties (White, Black, Tropical, and Red, a tradition he picked up in Manhattan).

The Red Party was renowned for the care that Reynolds would put in decoration and entertainment for the night, an aspect that newer parties would adopt as the Circuit spread across the nation.[20] The Red was just as much a venue for aesthetic expression as it was a dance party, and a showcase for the special guests who Reynolds would invite, including the drag queen-turned-actress Divine and, on one memorable occasion, singer-actress Grace Jones riding onstage on a motorcycle. The last Red Party (2001), called "Red Fetish," featured televangelist Tammy Faye as its guest of honor.

What was most important to Reynolds, however, was inclusion. Anyone who wanted to attend his parties was welcome, and he incorporated his guests into his production. One year, he had participants bring kitchen appliances that they had painted red, which he then installed on the spot as decorations. He was not impressed with the *A list*, those people who, due to connections, physical beauty, or wealth, considered themselves to be the best of the best. He despised the custom of setting up separate lounges for VIPs (Very Important People) and called them "V-I-Piss lounges" (interview, July 2001).

Even after Rudely Elegant closed in the early 1980s, the Red Party continued in rented spaces whose location would be kept secret in its formative years to prevent police from shutting it down. Eventually, it found a home in the Valleydale Ballroom, a large venue on the

20. Pageantry and décor are marks of the bigger Circuit events, and are one reason for the high price of admission. Production costs for Black and Blue 2002: The Main Event entitled "Humanité," for example, were approximately $225,000 (*Humanité* 74).

outskirts of Columbus. The Red's shift from bar to rented space is now standard practice for most Circuit parties today[21]; few clubs can handle the large numbers of participants that show up at major Circuit events.

San Francisco is an alternative site for the start of the larger Circuit. In the late 1970s, the City by the Bay had a Circuit-style club, Trocadero Transfer, which brought Manhattan sensibilities to the West Coast, including White, Black, and Red Parties. It had its own nationally famous dance scene distinct from Manhattan, including its own DJs and light technicians.

A third alternative would be Chicago. What would eventually become known as "Circuit music" also developed with the "outsourcing" of Manhattan club culture to Second City. In the late 1970s, Manhattan DJ Frankie Knuckles (a.k.a. "the Godfather of House") brought New York musical sensibilities to a Chicago club called the Warehouse.[22] Knuckles would rework recorded music, extend the rhythm by stretching the groove over a longer period of time without dumbing it down in mindless repetition, and preserving what he calls the "heart" of the song (interview, October 2004). Rather than the restrictive three-and-a-half-minute radio format of so many releases, the remixed result was more suited to the pace of the dancer. The innovations that he and others were perfecting would create a new sound known as house music, which was named after Knuckle's DJ residency, the Warehouse.

Frankie Knuckles and his peers brought a strong spiritual component to club culture that goes beyond the pleasures of the flesh. Knuckles uses the language of religion when he describes what he has been doing for the last forty years:

> For me, it's definitely like church.... Because, when you've got three thousand people in front of you, that's three thousand different personalities. And when those three thousand personalities become one personality, it's the most amazing thing. It's like that in church. By the time the preacher gets everything going, or that choir gets everything going, at one particular point, when things start peaking, that whole room becomes one, and that's the most amazing thing about it. (Brewster and Broughton 292)

21. Reynolds suggested the Red Party could also have been a forerunner of Raves. Ravers in the 1980s would likewise keep their venues secret to prevent police interference. The Red Party was different from the Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit and more like the Rave scene in one important aspect: Reynolds welcomed everyone to attend, regardless of sexual orientation or gender.
22. Knuckles described the Warehouse as "church for people who have fallen from grace" (Reynolds 30).

As mentioned earlier, house music emerged seamlessly from disco. House could be considered, in fact, less commercialized and more sophisticated disco music. "I view house music as disco's revenge," said Knuckles (Brewster and Broughton 292). House music quickly became the preferred sound for Circuit parties and the soon-to-be Rave scene as they spread throughout North America, Europe, and Australia. As house music diversified into techno house and a myriad other forms, Circuit DJs picked and chose which forms would be applicable for masses of cracked-out Gay men.

Regardless of where one places the origin of the second Circuit, it gained momentum as Gay men in major cities began to set up festival weekends of their own. The pattern went something like this: a group of close friends, often men who would visit Fire Island together, would decide to have an event in their city. They would contact their friends across the country that they had met on Fire Island and send them tickets to sell to *their* friends to raise money for a decent sound system, lights, venue, decoration, and entertainment. Parties that started out with maybe 300 participants would grow to 5,000–plus as word got out. Initially, these parties were called "Pines" or "Pavilion" parties, named after the Fire Island Pines and a dance venue there called the Pavilion (Lou Piper, interview, July 2006).

AIDS almost brought the Gay male dance scene to a standstill. Property on Fire Island became a buyer's market because so many owners had died. The first Circuit nearly disappeared, and the second one almost stopped dead in its tracks.

1985–1988: AIDS, Paradise Lost, and the Martyrdom of the Saint

The year 1985 was bad for the Saint, the club scene, and Gay people, especially Gay men. Because AIDS was so prevalent amongst the Saint's patrons, it was labeled "the Saint disease" (Brewster and Broughton 201). The following quote from *The Gay Metropolis* by Charles Kaiser describes the effect of AIDS on the New York Gay male community during the '80s:

> Gay men in Manhattan from the generation born after World War II would suffer at least a fifty percent casualty rate from this scourge.… Virtually every Gay man in every large American city would experience the death of at least ten friends during the epidemic; for some, the number of deceased friends and acquaintances has surpassed three hundred. (283)

The catastrophic effects of the epidemic crippled the Gay male club scene. Belatedly, the management of the Saint would police the balcony

to prevent further sexual acts that could lead to new infections, but it was too late. Cheren describes the fall of the Saint:

> The Saint was so huge that it could comfortably hold several thousand, and for years it was crammed every Saturday night. But by 1988, it was lucky if it drew a few hundred souls, even on a good night. The rest were either dead or mourning or dying, or taking care of someone who was. At one point the club sent out its annual membership renewals and over 700 came back marked: Return to Sender—Occupant Deceased. The spirit had completely gone out of the place. (425)

The Paradise Garage closed down in 1987. Larry Levan spun the last twenty-four hours of the Paradise Garage's weekend-long closing party "as the last weeping revelers gathered in a circle and lit candles" (Cheren 411). The Garage reverted back to an ordinary garage (412).

On April 30, 1988, the Saint had its closing party, a marathon event with ten DJs who spun nonstop for forty hours. The last DJ, Robbie Leslie, finished the party at noon on Monday, May 1. Cheren describes the end:

> The final chord, the last beat echoed and faded, and it was all over beneath the cavernous dome. Small groups of young men looked old with grief and loss. Nobody wanted to leave, leaving meant never returning, but slowly we stumbled out into the street onto high noon on an overcast regular Monday workday in New York. People were going about their business rushing around, walking dogs, shopping, hailing cabs. (428)

1988: Rebirth

The community rallied. As Corbett Reynolds said about the grief, panic, and despair of those times, "You still have to dance" (interview, July 2001).[23] In spite (or perhaps because) of the fear and depression that AIDS had brought to those fledgling Gay communities, people needed a release, a space in which they could commemorate their lost ones and celebrate being alive.

At the end of the 1980s, the tradition of holding dances for Gay activism returned. There was a shift, however, from political causes to activism on the medical front to help those unfortunates who were succumbing to the plague. Major cities threw new parties with Circuit sensibilities in many major cities as AIDS fundraisers, and their popularity grew. Successful treatment and remission of the dread illness, along with an underground steroid and marijuana network to help those with

23. Reynolds was also instrumental in raising awareness of and money for people with AIDS in Columbus.

AIDS wasting syndrome, led to a resurgence of the dance community and a noticeable number of muscular (and apparently healthy) men who might or might not be HIV-positive. What began as events for 200 or so people once again mushroomed into extravaganzas for as many as 24,000.

Regular dance clubs couldn't hold many of the main events of these annual weekend festivals. Like the Red Party, they would take place in large rented venues rather than clubs requiring year-round upkeep.

Second-generation Circuit parties are now Gay traditions in their own right. Major parties are larger than life, with mesmerizing stage shows and fabulous costumes. Gay men's involvement with theater has had a profound effect on the Circuit. Premier Circuit parties regularly stage state-of-the-art productions with professional dancers, acrobats, elaborate stage props, well-rehearsed choreographic numbers, and eye-catching special effects—all designed to energize the participants as well as entertain them. The link to theater was strong in the days of the first Circuit and is still strong today; the legendary Saint was once a Yiddish theater. Ric Sena, the producer of the highly-theatrical Alegria events (part of the latest wave of innovative Circuit reinvention), was a theater manager in Rio de Janeiro before he moved to New York (personal communication, August 2007).

The theatricality of the Circuit adds to its spiritual potential. Since there is such a strong connection between the theatrical and the spiritual in the Gay community (theater as Gay people's church), the notion that Circuit parties are frames for experiencing and expressing transcendence does not seem to be such a stretch.

But even with the glitter and wow of professional entertainment in the Circuit, a higher premium is placed on Circuiteers as *the* show rather than performers on stage or in the DJ booth. Continuing the patterns set by the first generation, DJs do not disturb the dancers by talking over the music. Unless the performer is a renowned celebrity, professionals usually tailor performances to mix in for the duration of one song and mix out with the next without skipping a beat—no speeches, no encores. The real action is on the dance floor.

The Manhattan-Fire Island Circuit did not die. Manhattan is the home of the Pride Pier Dance, the Saint-At-Large Black, White,[24] and New Year's Parties, and the Alegria parties thrown at various times of

24. I have been told by those who went to the old Saint that, indeed, the Saint-at-Large White Party had its share of ghosts who attended the festivities. "There used to be a place in the ceiling of the Roseland where the dead came in to be with us as we danced," said Candida Scott Piel, a woman whose fierce intellect and passion are dedicated to dancing and to helping people with AIDS (personal communication, January 2008).

the year. Fire Island has its own Circuit events—all held in the summer—including the Invasion of the Pines, the Pines Party, Rites of Summer, and Ascension.

The Second Circuit

The second Circuit reached its peak at about the year 2000 with events in San Diego (Zoo Party); Long Beach, California (Shockwave); San Francisco (Folsom St. Fair, Colossus); Palm Springs (White Party); Las Vegas (Viva Las Vegas); Dallas (Purple Party); Austin (Meltdown, Splash); Chicago (Fireball, International Male Leather, Market Days, Pumpkinhead); Detroit (Motorball); Louisville (Crystal Ball); Columbus (Red Party); Cleveland (Erie Party); New Orleans (Southern Decadence, Halloween); Birmingham, Alabama (Rites of Spring); Atlanta (Hotlanta); Pensacola (Memorial Day); Orlando (Gay Days); Miami (White Party, Winter Party); Washington, D.C. (Cherry, Colors of the Fall); Philadelphia (Blue Ball); New York (Black Party, Pier Dance); and Provincetown, Massachusetts (Summer Camp). Outside of the United States, Toronto (Unified); Montreal (Black and Blue, Bal des Boys, Red Party, Wild and Wet); Amsterdam (Black Party, White Party, Orange Party); Cape Town (MCQP); Phuket, Thailand (Nation); and Sydney (Sleaze Ball-Sydney Mardi Gras) also joined the Circuit.

Like the drag balls of the 1930s, the second Circuit went public. Events have been held in some magnificent spaces, such as the Palm Springs and Miami convention centers (White Parties), Old Post Office Building in D.C. (Cherry), Naval shipyard and Constitution Center in Philadelphia (Blue Ball), Queen Mary cruise ship docked in Long Beach, San Francisco City Hall (ReUnion), the San Diego Zoo (Zoo Party), Vizcaya Mansion in Miami (White Party), Universal Studios and Disney World theme parks in Orlando (Gay Days-One Mighty Weekend), the Olympic Stadium in Montreal (Black and Blue), and huge beach parties in South Beach (White Party, Winter Party), Pensacola (Memorial Day Wave), and Fire Island (Pines Party, Morning Party, Ascension).

1996: D.C. Cherry Jubilee and the US Congress

Perhaps the most controversial of the new parties was Cherry (originally Cherry Jubilee) in Washington, D.C., which attracted the unwanted attention of the US Congress when it was held in a federally-owned building. Bill Pullen, Cherry co-founder, describes Cherry's origins:

> When I lived in Philadelphia, I was part of the Blue Ball committee. That was where I got my introduction to (and first behind-the-scenes look at) Circuit parties. Right around the same time in the mid-'90s, I

started traveling around the country to the various parties. I met a lot of new people and formed some good friendships in various parts of the country. While at these parties, I started to have what I called spiritual experiences where I felt connected to me and everyone around me. It was great.

When I moved to D.C., there was no Circuit party. Sometime in early 1995, I started to have the urge to throw a party in D.C. I was driven by the urge to create a spiritual experience for others, like so many people had done for me. I also saw it as an opportunity to raise money for the local AIDS service organizations and introduce younger people, who couldn't afford to participate in higher price fundraisers, the opportunity to attend a fundraiser while having a lot of fun.

Ryan Peal (my boyfriend at the time) and I were driving home from a weekend away when I told him I wanted to start a party in D.C. He was immediately on board with the idea. Four of us [Pullen, Peal, Kenny Eggerl, and Dave Parham] met on a weekly basis, pulling in additional people who had the expertise we needed along the way. In addition, we promoted the event around the country. Our network of friends in the various cities around the country served as local ambassadors in their respective cities.

The first year was a smashing success. We grossed $130,000 and, after expenses, we were able to donate $55,000 to our beneficiaries (personal communication, December 2007).

But not everyone was pleased with the success of Cherry Jubilee. On May 9, 1996, California Representative Robert Dornan[25] spoke before the House of Representatives about the Cherry Jubilee Circuit party that had recently been held in Mellon Auditorium, a federal building:

Mr. Speaker, the following article describes an event that should never have taken place in a Federal building. Even worse, after this vulgar event occurred, a followup [sic] recovery brunch was held in another Federal building—our own Rayburn building.[26]

Representative Dornan then presented in its entirety an article by Marc Morano that was published in the *Congressional Record*, entitled

25. Dornan describes himself as "a God-fearing American, a very lucky husband of 41 years, a father of 5 stalwart, God-loving adult children, a grandfather of 10—No. 11 is in the hanger" (*Congressional Record*, June 27, 1996).

26. Pullen recounts the following story about the brunch in the Rayburn House Office Building that *didn't* make it to the floor of Congress: "Because it was a government office building, Capitol police were stationed at the front door of the building. Attendees had to pass through a metal detector as they went through security. It didn't take long before one attendee after another started setting off the metal detector. We hadn't thought about the fact that people would be wearing [metal] cock rings. Ryan took on the job of standing out front of the building and warning people to remove their cock rings before getting to the metal detector. People started ducking into the bushes removing them" (interview, December 2007).

"GOP: Choosing Sides in the Culture War?" The article describes Morano's experiences as an undercover reporter for the conservative Christian organization, Family Research Council, as he infiltrated the Cherry Jubilee Main Event:

> The dance party featured public nudity, illicit sexual activity and evidence of illegal drug use…. A Federal building, the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium, played host to the dance and was the backdrop for the illegal activity.

Morano's description of Circuiteers, their appearance, and their behavior during the event is similar to my own. He notes that there were several thousand men, most between twenty-five and thirty-five years old, and the vast majority of them White. He also includes observations of outrageous wordplay and the lack of violence in a noticeably muscular group of well-groomed, shirtless men:

> Most of the shirts came off as the men headed for the dance floor.... There were no signs of aggressive behavior…. No fights or altercations occurred throughout the night. The terms "fags" and "girls" were frequently used…. Overall the men were generally very neat, with meticulous hair and clothing … the overwhelming majority had bodies sculpted from weight lifting.

Like Michelangelo Signorile, Morano links the Circuit community to recklessness, AIDS, and death. Morano's observation that most participants appeared in good health and were drinking beer and bottled water in a venue that provided apples, bananas, and oranges does not keep him from citing questionable data concerning Gay male mortality:

> The image of young active health conscious men, drinking bottled water and consuming fruit is a study in contrast…. The life expectancy of a homosexual male is estimated to be no more than 41 years old, regardless of AIDS. The homosexual communities credo seems to be "Die young and leave a pretty corpse."

But Morano's biggest fixation is on sex and drugs:

> As the constant thump, thump, thump of the techno music heated the crowd, the dancing became increasingly lewd and suggestive … dancers began simulated sexual gyrations. The dance floor became a torrent of intense groping and stroking. Some couples dancing on table tops [dance boxes?], mimicked anal sex through their clothing while others pantomimed oral sex…. Despite signs posted everywhere stating, "Use or possession of illegal substances strictly forbidden," evidence of illegal drug use was present…. Snorting could be heard throughout the evening in bathroom stalls.

In addition to snorting and pantomimed sex, Morano was outraged by the presence of men in drag, Leathermen, and scantily-clad Lesbians, one who flashed her breasts while dancing on a "table top." The breast-flashing Lesbian is the only example he gives of public nudity, however.

In conclusion, Morano ties Cherry Jubilee 1996 to the entire Gay community and its mission to corrupt America, proof that "the homosexual agenda is advancing in Washington" (*Congressional Record*, May 9, 1996).

Public reaction to the infiltration of the Circuit in D.C. by the Family Research Council in 1996 was substantially different from the infiltration of molly houses in England by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners in the early 1700s and drag balls in NYC by the Society for the Suppression of Vice in the early twentieth century. In the case of the Circuit, nobody was jailed, pilloried, or executed.

Dornan's presentation to Congress on May 9, 1996, led to bickering between conservatives and liberals concerning the homosexual agenda, Gay-bashing, and AIDS in America. On June 27, Dornan continued to berate his colleagues about Cherry Jubilee, and even read Morano's article to them. Supporting his own position with references to the Holy Spirit, Moses, Reverend Billy Graham (and his wife, Ruth), Pope John Paul II, Holy Mother Church, and Christian love, Dornan contrasts the moral laxity of homosexual men with the discipline of soldiers in uniform:

> Imagine for a moment, Mr. Speaker, if the out-of-control homosexual romp that we judge today had happened on any U.S. military base or post anywhere throughout the world. What would the repercussions have been? Batten down the hatches … how dare we live by a lower, a much lower, standard of ethics and professionalism than we demand of our younger military men and women who serve under our jurisdiction, and who do risk their very lives. [sic] A slim majority of Members of Congress allow [sic] thousands of troopers of our 1st Armored Division to be sent by Clinton into harm's way in Bosnia, and yet our Congress ignores garbage like this "Cherry romp" of hedonism right here down on Constitution Avenue (Congressional Record, June 27, 1996).[27]

Pullen relates his feelings on discovering their fundraiser had been debated in Congress, and the backlash he and his colleagues faced from the larger Gay community:

27. Dornan also implies that Cherry Jubilee was worse than the 1991 Tailhook scandal in Las Vegas, when ninety people (the vast majority of them women) stated they were physically assaulted and sexually harassed by active and retired military personnel attending the thirty-fifth annual symposium on Navy and Marine aviation.

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Poster for DC Cherry 7 2002. The military theme of poster is to show solidarity with the rest of the nation after the terrorist attacks on DC and Manhattan on 9/11/2001.

It was surreal for those of us who planned the party to hear our names used on the floor of Congress and to hear our event talked about in such a disparaging way. Being new to D.C., I wasn't savvy to the ways of politics at the time. In our minds, we were four guys sitting around my kitchen table who wanted to throw a party and raise some money for people with AIDS. It never crossed our minds that something so good could be twisted into something bad. What was the most disheartening for me was the response from the Gay press. One of the major Gay publications called to interview me. They asked what we were thinking, throwing a Circuit party in a federal office building, as if we had done something wrong (interview, December 2007).

Cherry Jubilee, now known as Cherry, continued to use federal buildings for its functions. But the protective Gay bubble around the Circuit was about to burst.

1998: Death, Scandal, and the Morning Party

The unexpected success of the second Circuit was not always a good thing. Well-connected circles of friends who started many of the major events watched with growing apprehension as the unwashed masses began participating in droves. Special VIP passes were devised to create a separate space for those *aficionados* who did not want to be constantly surrounded by the less refined. The potential for VIP passes to raise more money, however, led to their acquisition by anyone who could afford them, regardless of their level of sophistication.

As prices got higher, so did the participants, and a significant number of them became progressively messier. Trouble was on the way.

Like molly houses and drag balls, public awareness of Circuit parties would lead to condemnation. Increased numbers of Circuit participants led to more problems and more bad press. The first sign that the second Circuit was in trouble was when scandal broke out concerning an event called the Morning Party.[28]

The biggest dance extravaganza of the year on Fire Island has been the Pines Party, a beach event with the date fixed according to the tide tables. Traditionally held in August, the Pines Party is more than just a Circuit party; it is a community social, with food and other entertainment besides dancing. The Morning Party was once the main event of the Pines Party weekend.

Initially, the Pines Party began as a once-only gig in the 1979 in order to raise money for a fire truck. In 1983, the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) began the Morning Party to raise funds for people with HIV. Like Miami's Winter Party, the Morning Party was held on the beach on a Sunday from late morning throughout the afternoon, accessorizing the beauty of the Atlantic as the backdrop for the event.

The Morning Party helped the Pines weekend become a full-fledged Circuit party. Problems arose, however, because of the sheer size of the event, which drew 5,000–plus people. Since there is no hospital and no paved roads are on that part of the island, health emergencies are airlifted by helicopter to Long Island. On August 16, 1998, hours before the Morning Party was to commence, a man died from a GHB overdose.

28. I must thank my NYC collaborators Alan Flippen, Steve Weinstein, and Ben Peraza for their input about the Manhattan Circuit scene and the events that led to the demise of the Morning Party.

Twenty-one participants were arrested that same day for drug possession. For the Pines, a tiny but internationally notorious community, the scandal had become unmanageable and far too visible to the outside world; 1998 was not the first year that drug overdose hade been an issue. Accusations that the GMHC was encouraging irresponsible sexual behavior and drug abuse led the organization to permanently cancel the Morning Party.

In hindsight, the Morning Party was a disaster waiting to happen. A typical Pines summer weekend involved no fewer than two dance events per day from Friday to Sunday. Because of the ubiquitous house parties and the sexual action in the Meat Rack, participants can go full throttle from Friday through Sunday.

Partying in the same place for so long is potentially disastrous no matter where it takes place, even more so in the Pines with no standing police force. The distinction between party space and public (read *sober*) space is undermined, especially in the Meat Rack next door. It is easy to imagine oneself immersed at all times in the world of the carnivalesque. Participants may feel that they never have to fret about the personal accountability demanded by convention and by force of law when re-entering public sober space between venues. Large numbers of visitors with no connection to the local community only reinforce the lack of accountability.

The Winter Party in South Beach is also a beach party on a Sunday afternoon in a weekend full of dance events that go nonstop from Friday to Monday. What makes the Winter Party different from the Morning Party is its location in a much more public space. A hospital is minutes away. Unlike the Pines, South Beach is not a predominantly Gay male enclave, and it has a visible police force. There is much more of an obvious need to carry oneself with at least a minimum pretense of sobriety. In turn, this keeps the most flagrant violators in line because, for some Circuit queens, fear of arrest is perversely greater than fear of dying.

By 2000, the problems that haunted the Morning Party were evident everywhere in the Circuit. Larger numbers led to less personal accountability for a significant number of participants. GHB was used irresponsibly by too many men. This occurred with ever-increasing frequency and severely damaged the credibility of Circuit parties as harmless fundraisers. From 1997 to 2003, the Gay male club scene across the nation was inundated with ever-increasing numbers of men being hospitalized for GHB overdose. The scene was getting the wrong kind of national attention.

Although some participants see 1998 to 2001 as the golden age of the Circuit, it was also the Circuit at its worst. For too many participants, the Circuit became a safe haven for bad behavior.

2001: Downsizing

Over the years since the early 1990s, Circuit parties had been growing in size, extravagance, expense, and ambulance runs. Since 2001, however, the scene has been down-sizing. Numbers have been lower at most of the parties. Some events have disappeared altogether.

This is due in part to bad publicity. The Circuit world lost even more credibility in 2001 when professional journals published two articles about excessive drug use and sexual behavior during Circuit parties.[29] The reports sparked a series of investigations by health officials, law enforcement personnel, Gay/Straight media, and evangelical Christians. On June 20, 2002, the national newspaper *USA Today* had an article about the Circuit and rampant drug abuse (Leinward 11).

Four days later, *The O'Reilly Factor* television show featured a live-cast debate concerning the same issue. The debate was between two Gay men, Richard Elovich (pro-Circuit) and Michelangelo Signorile (anti-Circuit), which degenerated into a shouting match between them. O'Reilly, a conservative pundit who is not known to be a supporter of the Gay community, appeared to be delighted with the fracas.

In some ways, however, the questionable public behavior of Elovich and Signorile may have helped the Circuit and the Gay community. The spectacle of two Gay men sassing each other as an amused conservative commentator watched them go at it probably led many Straight Americans to laugh at Gay folk and Circuit parties rather than condemn them.

Bad press did not stop there. In August of 2003, *The O'Reilly Factor* featured another debate about Circuit ethics, this time focusing on the Orlando Gay Days Circuit weekend. Martin Mawyer, president of the Christian Action Network, claimed that Disney World was irresponsible when it allowed a Circuit party on its premises. He then showed footage from One Mighty Party (a Gay Days event held in Disney World) to illustrate Gay depravity. Chris Alexander-Manley, co-owner of Gay Days, Inc., pointed out that the footage had been digitally modified so that shirtless men appeared to be completely naked as they danced together. In a case of mutually-contradictory spins, Mawyer portrayed the parties as more decadent than they really were, and Alexander-Manley glossed over the more scandalous aspects of Circuit parties in the Magic Kingdom.

29. Mattison 2001, 119–26; Mansergh 2001, 953–58. The Mansergh et al article indicates that there is substantial drug use and sex during Circuit weekends. The abstract concludes that "Intensive, targeted health promotion efforts are needed" (Mansergh 953). The Mattison et al article states, "Circuit party attendees are well educated and financially secure. Party drug use is high … [party drugs] are associated with various measures of unsafe sex. More comprehensive research on club drug use in Gay men is required" (120).

In Palm Springs, problems with GHB almost ended Jeffrey Sanker's White Party. From 2001–2003, Mayor Will Kleindienst attempted to have the event cancelled permanently, and Sanker understood why. "He had every reason" to shut the party down, said Sanker (interview, September 2007).

In addition to GHB overdose, irresponsible crystal methamphetamine usage further undermined the Circuit. The popularity of crystal meth as a sexual enhancer as well as a stimulant changed the sexual dynamics of the Gay male community. Instead of going to the bars or Circuit parties to "hook up," men would go online to Internet men-for-men sites, make their selections, and bypass the bar/Circuit scenes completely. But even though fewer men were attending the Circuit because of sex, drugs, and the Internet, the Circuit was nevertheless blamed for encouraging men to become addicted to crystal.

The backlash was inevitable. Even before 2001, the federal government has been waging an aggressive campaign to eradicate the Rave scene because of drug use associated with it.[30] Since the rationale behind this campaign was to save the youth of America from drugs, the older, Gay-er Circuit community has not been targeted with the same vehemence. It was only a matter of time, however, before the Circuit faced the same pressures as the Rave community, but from other Gay men and Christian homophobe groups as well as law enforcement.

In 2002, the final big event of Gay Days featured a typical pat-down for illegal substances, but with a new feature: police were on hand to arrest anyone caught with drugs. This was a departure from the usual protocol, which was to forbid the offender from entering the party and confiscation of illegal substances.

Drug scandals are not the only things that have hurt the Circuit; commercialization of the Circuit has disillusioned many of its original founders. Many of the people who originally threw these parties are tired of the hassles, time, and financial risk that they face when they put on an event. In-fighting that occurs among members of Circuit organizations can be relentless and devastating. There has been more than one instance of illegal profiteering by unscrupulous people within organizations.

Since 2002, many Circuit parties have ceased to exist. The Columbus Red Party and its successor, Chrome Party, are finished. Atlanta Hotlanta, Chicago Fireball and Pumpkinhead, D.C. Colors of the Fall, Cleveland Erie Party, Detroit Motorball, San Francisco Hell Ball, Austin Splash and Perfect Day, and Louisville Crystal Ball ended.

30. After an unsuccessful attempt to pass the RAVE (Reduce America's Vulnerability to Ecstasy) Act in 2002, Congress passed the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act in 2003 by quietly placing it within the Amber Alert Act for missing children.

Fewer dance clubs outside of LA, San Francisco, NYC, Fire Island, Chicago, and Miami are hiring Circuit DJs on non-Circuit weekends. This is due in part to concerns with Circuit music as an inspiration for irresponsible drug use, especially with the rise in crystal meth addiction among Gay men.

Other parties have modified their status to keep themselves afloat. LGBTQ groups involved with community awareness and political activism are sponsoring Circuit events as fundraisers. In 2004, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF)[31] took over the Miami Winter Party. The NGLTF also sponsors a beach party on Fire Island called Ascension. The Philadelphia Blue Ball merged with the Equality Forum.[32] And although there are currently no Circuit parties in their traditional birthplace of Columbus, Ohio, the annual Qualia Festival of Gay Folklife follows Circuit sensibilities and throws fundraiser dances with Circuit DJs during its festival weekend. This modest event is all that survives in the city that supposedly started it all.

Perhaps the biggest problems faced by the Circuit is the troubled economy of early twenty-first century America, the resurgence of politically-motivated homophobia, and the rise in martial patriotism after the attack on Manhattan on September 11, 2001, an echo of conditions that led to the end of extravagant drag balls in the 1930s. The country went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, which in turn fed a growing homophobic movement led by war-supportive Christian extremists and organizations such as Focus on the Family.

Unexpected Allies and the Second Rebirth

Police in cities that host Circuit parties are often those parties' allies. Since the law enforcement officers must deal with the violence of some Straight crowds at concerts and sporting events, the refreshingly well-behaved participants in Gay Circuit parties have inspired law enforcement officers for years to overlook all but the most blatant displays of drug use. Police tend to be tolerant and even supportive of Circuit events, which often provide them with off-duty employment as security. Local law enforcement personnel have everything to gain by coordinating their efforts with, not against, the Circuit.

Circuiteer-journalist Scotty Van Tussenbrook described the following conversation he had with police at a Circuit party:

> While attending the White Party in Palm Springs, I found myself standing next to a couple of off-duty cops who were hired as security. I asked

31. The NGLTF was founded in 1972 as a national LGBTQ civil rights organization.
32. Centered in Philadelphia, the Equality Forum's mission is to advance national and international LGBTQ civil rights.

> them what they were thinking. The woman officer replied, "Oh, this is our favorite party of the year!" and the (presumably) Straight male officer with her nodded. The man said that at most Straight parties and sporting events they have to prepare for lots of "'incidents"—fights, drunkenness, drama. "But we never get any of that at the White Party," the woman added. "You guys just show up, take off your shirts, look pretty, and dance. It's fun!" (personal communication, November 2002)

In many places, law enforcement officers tend to keep away from Gay functions. This may be due to homophobia and the Gay bubble. But many law enforcement officers recognize that there is a lack of disruptive violence at Gay male establishments, thus lessening the need for a strong police presence.

In *The Soul Beneath the Skin*, David Nimmons gives statistics from different cities that verify the remarkable lack of violence in the Gay community, including the bar scene (13–39). Nimmons also quotes police officers:

> "You want proof? Just ask any New York cop," says NYPD Sergeant Rodriguez. "They traditionally say Gay Pride is one of the most enjoyable events they attend. Cops will tell you they love doing it. Some cops will do anything not to work certain parades in the city but they are happy to work Gay Pride. Sometimes you get an initial homophobic response, sure. But once they've done it, they realize it's a safe day." (21)

Many police departments have no desire to cause problems for Circuit parties, which are often a welcome alternative, in terms of law enforcement and extra cash for officers, to more violent Straight events and nightclubs. Although no longer in the form of bribery and hush money as in times past, monetary benefits associated with supporting Gay festive culture is still a factor in maintaining cordial relationships with law enforcement. [33]

Bucking the trend for Circuit parties to downsize or even disappear, parties such as Alegria in NYC-Rio and the Salvation parties originating in London are immensely popular. Like traditional Circuit parties, these events do not depend on a single physical location. They differ from the typical Circuit event in that they may occur more than once a year.

There are signs of alternative Circuits that step outside of the narrow racial and body-sculpted aesthetic of the first and second Circuits. Seattle has a party called Northern Exposure, which avoids references

33. Politics, however, can change enforcement policies. For the last few years, there have been attempts in some major cities, particularly New York, to crack down on Gay dance venues.

to the standard icon of a chiseled male torso. There is also the Circuit-esque Lazy Bear Weekend in Guerneville, California. Northern Exposure and Lazy Bear might be called Bear Circuit parties, well within the tradition of Leather-based Circuit events but with absolutely no inclination to fit in within the mainstream Circuit's body fascist ideal.

There is also a circuit for Black men, dance parties thrown in conjunction with Black Gay Pride celebrations in cities such as D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, and Toronto. At this point, I do not know if this African American/Canadian circuit will become the newest incarnation of the Circuit because there may not be the same premium placed on DJ culture.

Internationally, the Circuit is growing. There are Circuit parties on every continent except for Antarctica. Cape Town in South Africa has the MCQP (Mother City Queer Projects) Party. Hong Kong had a White Party weekend and Taipei had one called Winter White, both held during Christmas. Thailand had a Circuit party called Nation that lasted for six years. Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia hosted the Princefest, perhaps the first event of its kind in a predominantly Muslim country. The current scene in East and Southeast Asia is volatile, however, and parties wink in and out of existence after only a few years, or even one season.

The Circuit is on the high seas. Atlantis Cruises offers what has been unofficially called week-long Circuit parties onboard their ships, complete with renowned DJs and theme parties. The Caribbean and the Mediterranean are accessorized as fabulous backdrops to enhance the cruise-liner-as-Circuit-party-venue.

Several events tend to be heavily dependent on the vision and direction of one charismatic person, such as Jeffrey Sanker, Johnny Chisholm, Mark Baker, and Ric Sena. As with the demise of the Columbus Red Party after the death of its founder, Corbett Reynolds, some events may last only as long as their charismatic mentors are able to produce them.

The Circuit's folk media reflects both the downsizing of the second Circuit and the recent upswing. Until fairly recently, there was growing pressure on Circuit-based businesses to find new sources of revenue as numbers of participants fell and Circuit events disappeared. Plenty of male participants did not identify themselves as Circuit boys, and the word "Circuit" had stigma attached to it that is so great that many of the major parties no longer identify themselves as Circuit parties.

The hardcopy magazine/website *Circuit Noize* has also been moving away from the word "Circuit." *Circuit Noize* started out in 1995 with the subtitle, "A Rag Custom Designed for Crazed Party Boys."

When the Circuit increased dramatically in numbers and events over the next few years, the subtitle became "The Premier Guide to Circuit Events Worldwide." *Circuit Noize* modified its subtitle again as the Circuit began to decline in 2004 to "The Premier Guide to Dance Events Worldwide." In 2007, the magazine finally changed its name to *noiZe Magazine*, subtitled "Celebrate Explore Live."

Editor Steve Ceplenski explains the name change in the premier issue of *noiZe Magazine* (Spring 2007):

> Just as being gay becomes less and less of a marginal cultural phenomenon … the Circuit has also become just one part of a larger gay culture. The issues that once seemed Circuit-centric—such as world travel, attending festivals and dance events, taking cruises, and celebrating our lives—now have a broader, more varied appeal to the ascendant gay community at large. As a result, we here at noiZe feel that the time is right to recognize that our focus is no longer solely Circuit events, but lounges, bars, clubs, all types of music, healthful living, and a wide variety of dance events. (8)

On the other hand, *EDGE* online magazine has embraced the word "Circuit." *EDGE* began its "Circuit Parties" section in 2006. Jake Resnicow, *EDGE* editor, describes the rationale for starting a section with a stigmatized label:

> When I joined EDGE in April 2006, we were just getting our feet wet in the Boston market, and we knew our vision was to provide up-to-the-minute coverage for the GLBT community that was better, faster, and more edgy than anything else out there. To fully embrace all aspects of the community and stay true to our mission, we recognized the importance of creating both "Nightlife" and "Circuit Party" sections. Although we acknowledged some correlation between the two, there remained a strong demand for genuine, edgy, front-line coverage of national events. We valued the importance of capturing the less-talked-about aspects of the Circuit—global celebration, major fundraising, and phenomenal music. From New York's still-ever popular Alegria to the crown jewel of fundraisers, the White Party Miami, there has been no question that the Circuit is still very strong. (interview, January 2008)

JustCircuit.Mag, a new hardcopy magazine, debuted November 2007, reflecting the recent upswing in the Circuit's popularity. Shane Rogers, the executive editor, describes the creation of the new periodical:

> We've taken an unusual course in that we have gone from website to hardcopy/online magazine. In doing so, we are expanding the product to reach every possible person in our extended community. Despite

having fewer readers than the Web site, the magazine gives our message about the worthiness of the Circuit a permanent place in history. For instance, you'll be able to find a copy of JustCircuit.Mag in the Library of Congress long after we are all gone. (interview, January 2008)

A Third Circuit?

There is also the possibility of a third Circuit, one that is more open to Straight people. This is a movement that has roots going back to the first days of the Columbus Red Party some thirty years ago.

The movement to actively encourage Straight people to attend Circuit events also occurred in Montreal with the merging of Circuit and house cultures in parties thrown by the Bad Boy Club Montréal (BBCM). The nascent third Circuit has its own yearly calendar of festivals in Montreal (Bal des Boys; Red, Hot and Dry; Black and Blue), the biggest being Black and Blue, held in early October. Black and Blue is one of the largest and most elaborate Circuit parties in the second Circuit as well, but differs from Circuit parties in other cities because so many Straight people are participants (about 50 percent of the crowd).

In addition to what the BBCM is doing, two other major events in Montreal can be considered Circuit parties. The first is Bal en Blanc, Montreal's White Party, which has Gay sensibilities but 85 percent of the 15,000 or so participants are Straight. The second is the Grande Danse, a massive outdoor party that goes from noon to 11:00 PM on the Sunday of Montreal Pride Divers/Cité Weekend. This is the biggest dance party I have ever witnessed in my life. On the afternoon of August 5, 2007, the space for the Grande Danse was the size of six football fields and was packed with what must have been 50,000 revelers, the vast majority of them Gay men, all of them dancing to the music of DJ Stephan Grondin (Montreal). It was part of a multi-event, mega-street festival that had plenty of Straight people in it, perhaps 20 percent overall of the 100,000 or so attendees. The entrance fee of $2 was optional.

Still in the shadow of the second Circuit, the third Circuit is slowly making itself known outside of Quebec. In an article entitled "Reinventing the Circuit," the late Steve Kammon describes it as "the next level":

The most obvious way to grow these events is nothing new—Black and Blue in Montreal and Sydney Mardi Gras have been doing it for years. But it's never been done in America. We have never invited straight people to the parties of the Circuit. If our signature events could evolve

> into mixed events that offer a new kind of energy and which are bigger in scale and even better production standards, it would reinvigorate the scene. (24)

Kammon is not entirely correct; Reynolds, Chisholm, and Sanker have made it a point to invite Straight people to their events. The difference is the higher rate of integration (50 percent Straight as opposed to 5–15 percent) that Black and Blue has achieved over other events that encourage Straight patronage like Halloween's in New Orleans, White Party Palm Springs, White Party Miami, Winter Party, Black Party in NYC, and the former Columbus Red Party.

This third movement is a reflection of the wholesale acceptance of the Gay community in popular culture during the early 1990s and the creation of "mixed" Straight/Gay dance clubs with Circuit sensibilities in major cities. With the existence of Circuit-like clubs and events in Toronto, NYC, Montreal, and Miami that cater to both Straight and Gay crowds, this may be the beginning of a true inter-city movement of revelers, DJs, and Gay sensibilities that would extend to other cities and mark a new phase in Circuit culture. In this third Circuit, one hears a greater range of musical selections than at the typical Circuit event, and there is a greater tolerance for diversity.

In order to survive, most Circuit parties will have to be more than just refuges for cracked-out Circuit queens. Those that are not fundraisers will be more vulnerable to negative portrayals and crackdowns. Parties situated in community-based festivals stand a better chance. Many people feel that the age of the mega-party with 15,000 to 20,000 participants has seen its heyday. Smaller, more intimate, parties appear to be the wave of the future, with an even more open and inviting attitude toward Straight Circuiteers.

There is animated discussion among people in the scene concerning the newest crop of Circuiteers (between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five). Some of my sources say the drug use has gone down, while others feel that drugs still abound, but that there is a different set of favorites, which are liquor, cocaine, whatever Mom and Dad have in their medicine cabinet, and the occasional ecstasy pill.

Angie Denmon of Chisholm Productions (One Mighty Party, Halloween's in New Orleans, Pensacola Memorial Day) confirms that, from what she has seen, the younger generation is a refreshing change. "There are less ambulance runs," she told me. "I see fewer boys doing the cryptic walk (that marks GHB overdose). Hopefully, the Circuit veterans will see what they already know: less is more." Denmon has nothing but praise for the newcomers:

> They are much more into the music. My job is to greet everyone and make sure they have a good time. When I get there, I can tell that the energy they bring affects the DJs and the music they play. Because of the young ones' enthusiasm, the DJs are smiling more! This means that whatever feelings the intoxicants are supposed to make, the music can do it instead. That way you have a safer, more fun, less drama-stricken event (personal communication, August 2007).

Jeffrey Sanker finds that the younger generation favors liquor and Red Bull, while the older generation of Circuiteers is mellowing out. "There is a rise in liquor sales," he said, and bottle service (purchasing a bottle of liquor and carafes of mixers for customers who sit at tables) is increasing for the older set (interview, September 2007).

Steve Ceplenski, has a lot to say about the new kids on the dance box:

> The old Gay scenes and the new Gay scenes are different. Lounges, chill hangouts, restaurants and coffee houses are the new hangouts. There is, recently, a larger influx of the 20–something to the traditional benefit and Circuit events—mostly the innovative ones, outdoors, etc.

For Ceplenski, youth is measured by behavior, not years:

> You become old when you become jaded.... even if you don't think you are. If you're at an event, and someone is running up to the stage to see the performer (irrespective of their age), they are below the line. If you're walking away from the stage rolling your eyes at another diva singing, you're old, irrespective of your age.

Inclusion is definitely a trademark of the young:

> They don't have to be at a 100 percent Gay venue or event. The "Castro clone" of the 90's (beefy White boys) is replaced by waify White boys, hopping cute Asian boys, and sexy Latin boys. They want their Straight friends and co-workers to feel comfortable joining them.

So far as intoxicants, Ceplenski cautions against making too many sweeping generalities:

> I think it is regional, both statewide in the USA and continent-wide elsewhere. Clearly, our drug laws have not reduced the consumption, but they have replaced previously high quality products with fake and many times dangerous impurities. GHB seems to still be widely popular, with a resurgence of drop incidences at events. Tina has become stigmatized to the degree that it remains strong in a few large cities, and has ravaged straight Middle America more. Alcohol

is definitely on the upswing – for the younger crowd it is relatively cheap, and legal.

"There are fewer drugs and an unwillingness to try," Ceplenski said. "But," he warned, "sloppy drunks are not a pretty sight either" (interview, September 2007).

One spot that appears not to have changed for the better is Fire Island. During the 2007 Pines Party weekend, there were multiple overdoses on GHB. A few weeks later, the Ascension Party weekend was marred with continued overdoses and, unfortunately, a GHB-related death. Reports from participants say that it was the older, not younger, guys who were irresponsible with their use of intoxicants.[34]

The rediscovery of alcohol as the major drug of choice (along with an upsurge in cocaine and Red Bull to counteract alcohol's damaging effects on coordination and awareness) is perhaps a necessary measure to protect the new Circuiteers from police scrutiny. A person with liquor-breath is less of a target. One collaborator told me that many participants take their ecstasy pills before going to a function, and then ride that buzz with vodka and Red Bull for the duration of the party. That way, there is nothing on one's person (other than perhaps some selected prescription medications, such as Xanax, Vicodin, Percocet, Ritalin, and Valium) that could get one arrested.[35]

The Metrosexual

As it integrates Gays and Straights, the Circuit coincides with the rise of the *metrosexual*, a Straight man with Circuit sensibilities. The metrosexual is, in fact, a child of the Circuit.

With the advent of Gay-based comedy shows, "reality TV," Gay cable channel, and sympathetic presentation of Gay issues in the mainstream press, Americans are becoming more familiar with the Gay community, and some Straight men are choosing to abandon their heteronormative heritage and adopt Gay sensibilities. There is talk about the new urban man, dubbed by British writer Mark Simpson as "the metrosexual," who dresses with care and affects a Gay look regardless of his sexual proclivity: "Metrosexual man might prefer women, he might

34. There was also a corresponding increase of arrests, harsh treatment of some participants, and even violence on the part of police officers during Ascension weekend. These incidents on Fire Island—and a rather tense relationship between authorities and many clubs in Manhattan—does not, however, reflect trends in the nation as a whole.

35. Because of the upswing of prescription medicine-as-intoxicants in the club scene, it is common for police to arrest people, especially young people, caught with such drugs without a pharmaceutical bottle labeled with their name to show that the drug was prescribed to them.

prefer men, but when it's all said and done nothing comes between him and his reflection" (Simpson 209).[36]

In popular usage, however, the term refers solely to Straight men. In *The Metrosexual Guide to Style*, Michael Flocker sees the metrosexual as Straight but with a Gay male nonsexual orientation:

> The new breed of man is one of style, sophistication and self-awareness. He is just as strong as his predecessor, but far more diverse in his interests, his tastes and most importantly his self-perception. Secure in his masculinity, he no longer has to spend his life defending it … the walls separating straight men from their gay, fashion-forward brothers are beginning to crumble. (xiii)

The "newness" of copying Gay men's sensibilities in dress, manner, and physique for Straight male consumers is questionable. One need only look at the Baroque Age in terms of its aesthetic sensibilities to find tantalizing signs of earlier alliances. More recently (and with more direct proof), Susan Bordo traces some of the origins of metrosexual sensibilities back to 1974 when Calvin Klein visited the Flamingo, one of the original Manhattan/Fire Island Circuit clubs:

> Sex, as Calvin Klein knew, sells. He also knew that gay sex wouldn't sell to straight men. But the rock-hard athletic gay male bodies that Klein admired in the Flamingo did not advertise their sexual preference through the feminine codes—limp wrists, raised pinky finger, swishy walk—which the straight world then identified with homosexuality. Rather, they embodied a highly masculine aesthetic that, although definitely exciting for gay men, would scream "heterosexual" to (clueless) straights. (Bordo 401)

The biggest change since Klein's "discovery" and commodification of early Circuit sensibilities into designer jeans and underwear is that the general public now realizes that a rock-hard masculine body is no longer the sole domain of Straight men. It is becoming commonplace for people to assume that a muscular man who looks *too* good *must* be Gay. With this realization in mind, the typical Gay-mimicking metrosexual would not wish to appear out of shape any more than appear underdressed.

Circuit masculinity, with its privileging of muscle and macho, was born in the club tradition witnessed by Klein in 1974 and is becoming as commercially exploitable for stylish Straights as it is currently for Gay male consumers. More than a few metrosexuals have gone to

36. Simpson portrays the metrosexual as a commodity fetishist, not a lover of dance. I feel, however, that the existence of the Circuit in almost every major city for the last fifteen years has made its mark on popular culture and the metrosexual image.

Circuit parties or, if not quite ready to go that far, have gone to Gay clubs such as those in Miami, Toronto, New York, and Montreal that feature Circuit DJs and sensibilities. The Circuit and the metrosexual "movement" are blurring Gay and Straight boundaries, but with a notable difference. Their novelty is not so much in the blending of sensibilities but in the reduction of stigma attached to trendy urban homosexuality and the recognition of the masculine Gay man by Straight men as a positive role model.

Because the Circuit is so unabashedly masculine, and because young Straight men increasingly question the violence-tinged standards of heteronormative masculinity, I expect to see more Straight metrosexual men at Circuit parties. Like Gay men (and female Circuit girls), they, too, can enjoy ecstatic male-bonding camaraderie without having to worry about violence.[37]

The Circuit is currently making a modest comeback across North America. Within the last three years, White Party-Vegas, Wonderland in Los Angeles, Ascension on Fire Island, and One Night Only in Los Angeles have arrived on the Circuit scene. Austin Splash has been resurrected. Houston Jungle, Dallas Purple, Miami Winter and White, Halloween's in New Orleans, Orlando One Mighty Party, Vancouver Pride, Boston Pride, and Philadelphia Blue Ball are on the upswing. In Mexico, Latin Fever in Puerto Vallarta is still going after a decade.

The parties are returning to their roots as festivals for music and the joys of dance rather than sites for dangerously reckless behavior. "We have not had a single ambulance run from our party in the last three years," said Jeffrey Sanker about White Party-Palm Springs (interview, September 2007).

37. I also recommend that the Circuit community refrain from calling our Straight girlfriends the unflattering name of "fag hags." Since so many of these women think, act, and dress with Gay sensibilities, it would not be inappropriate to call Straight women "metrosexuals" as well as Straight men.

Commentary: Gazelle

NYC
December 2007

Well, I guess a lot of the Circuit for me was incredible sex. But, of course, I'm a great dancer and love dancing. I also happen to love sex!

I started going to Circuit parties in 1988. I *think* that was my first Saint At Large White Party. I remember going with my friend Rodney. It was at the old Saint and the dome was still there, I think. Maybe the dome was gone. Anyway, Saint did have parties for at least two years after the Saint officially closed. I'm not sure what they did with it the rest of the time. I do not remember my first Black Party—hardly surprising.

My first out-of-town party was White Party in Miami in 1993. Great way to start. I kept accelerating party-going. Palm Springs White Party in '95—I stayed with a friend who had a condo in Palm Springs. I remember it because I got four hours of sleep the whole weekend, I think. Also, hanging out at the pool was really fun, and there was an incredible sex party at [redacted]'s old estate. Very glamorous!

Oh yeah, I think even my first Miami White Party I went to MBHB [Miami Beach Hard Bodies exclusive orgies]. Those were the most amazing parties. Yeah, total body fascism, but amazing crowd. You had to go to an apartment in SOBE [South Beach] and be "inspected." If you passed, you paid twenty dollars and got directions to the house. It was in a really nice house with a beautifully landscaped pool area. Pretty amazing to be in a house like that with sixty-five super-hot guys! Also: Phoenix Rising. Best parties I've ever been to still, with possible exception of [redacted]'s post-Morning Party parties at their private home [Fire Island Pines]. I remember walking in while these super-hot guys from out of town were begging for a ticket. They were offering sex in return for entry! One year, when the Morning Party was in front of Beach Hill, some LA boys rented the house facing the party and had a huge sign made that covered the whole front of the house that said "No New Yorkers Allowed." That's how pissed they were at what they considered the *lèse majesté* toward their august bods, not getting into the post-party.

There was a party on July 4th weekend, which used to be bigger than Morning Party weekend on Fire Island, when [redacted] gave a party at his house, started at midnight. He served an ecstasy punch. I had two tiny cups, was so high I left and went dancing at the Pavilion, came back at 3:30 AM and the party was raging. Sex all over the house.

Like most people, I eventually cut down on my Circuit travels. There was a question of time. Also, recovery. Money. Most importantly, my partner was ill with AIDS, which would eventually kill him in 2001. After attending Mardi Gras in Sydney in 1998, I felt that I had pretty much done the Circuit anyway. After that experience, anything would be downhill. For the next two years, I traveled to Montreal for Black and Blue, generally considered the apex of that particular party. The first year it was held at Olympic Stadium and was truly incredible. Every time I looked up, I saw something else that was astounding, whether it was larger-than-life Balinese puppets wending through the crowd or a drummer high atop a huge carriage being pulled by several people. The next year, it was in the parking lot and was a bifurcated dance floor—never a good idea, since Gay men always think the other space is better and keep moving back and forth. That year, a girl in line asked my friends and me where we were from before announcing she had come from Toronto "for the rave." I think that was the year the party tilted very slightly toward non-Gay attendance. I kept trying to dance with the most gorgeous men wearing the skimpiest outfits only to have their friends politely tell me they didn't swing that way. Frustrating!

There's no question that the Circuit per se has changed. I won't say it's gone downhill, just evolving. Everybody in every situation harks back to some mythical Homeric Age when all was golden, and it's no different in the Circuit. For young guys coming of age, it's just as magical. And I don't look back and think that the Old Days were all so much better than today. My theme is *La Cage's* "The Best of Times Is Now." In the '70s, Gay men had much more attitude than they do now. If you didn't look a certain way, dress a certain way, drink a certain beer, smoke a certain cigarette, you weren't desirable. In the '80s, it was all about whether you had "it" [AIDS] or not. The '90s were the apex of body fascism, the heyday of the jackbooted Nazi party thugs. So even though the big arena events may be on the wane and the mid-sized cities don't get their theme parties as they did back in the day, that doesn't mean there isn't plenty of fun and camaraderie to be found on the dance floor.

By the way, I don't think Tina [crystal meth] ruined the scene. I'd say Tina was more a reflection of what was happening at the time. After all, meth has been around since World War II!

Chapter 9

A Tale of Two Cities: NOLA AND MIA

I keep hearing all this talk about "the Circuit is dying," blah blah blah…. Well, I can tell you that it is far from dead and it's only going to get better.

—Blake Baker, Purple Foundation board member

I have included detailed accounts of two major Circuit events I attended in the last few months of 2007: Halloween's in New Orleans and White Party Miami. Halloween's in New Orleans was held on the last weekend of October. White Party Miami was held Thanksgiving weekend. These parties are fundraisers for AIDS charities: Project Lazarus in New Orleans and Care Resource in Miami-Ft. Lauderdale. The two accounts were originally written for the Gay press, and are stylistically more journalistic than ethnographic. In order to give readers some idea of what actual events are like, the accounts are situated in my lived experience as a participant more so than from my position of scholarly detachment as an ethnographer.

Halloween's in New Orleans: Lazarus, Come Forth

NOLA (New Orleans, Louisiana) is world famous for its festivals. It is the home of two Circuit events: Southern Decadence on Labor Day weekend, and Halloween's in New Orleans on the closest weekend before October 31.

Halloween's in New Orleans is a four-day Circuit extravaganza that raises money for Project Lazarus (a.k.a. Lazarus House), a home for people living with AIDS. The name "Lazarus" comes from the Hebrew

name *Eleazar* meaning "God has helped." In the New Testament, Lazarus is not one but two different men in two different gospels, Luke and John.

In the Gospel of Luke (16:19–31), Lazarus is poor, sick, covered in sores, and abandoned to die alone in poverty at the gate of a rich man's house. Lazarus dies and goes to Heaven while the rich man who callously ignored him suffers in Hell. In the Gospel of John (11:1–44), however, Lazarus is a wealthy friend of Jesus who dies because Jesus is not there to save him. Four days later, Jesus risks life and limb to visit Lazarus at his tomb and then raises him from the dead. I saw elements of Luke's Lazarus and John's Lazarus when I visited the house of the same name on Dauphine Street, maybe two miles from the corner of St. Ann and Bourbon that is Gay Central.

I had arrived in New Orleans on Friday morning and immediately went to Oz, the infamous French Quarter Gay bar that never seems to sleep. Upstairs at Oz, volunteers from Project Lazarus were providing revelers from across the country with their pre-ordered weekend passes. I met Executive Director Eric Oleson, who invited me to stop by Lazarus and see the place for myself.

With several hours to kill on Friday afternoon, I had two options available to me if I stayed at Oz: (1) get drunk, or (2) get really drunk. I chose a third course: visit Project Lazarus. Leaving Oz, its go-go boys (they started dancing around noon), and the growing crowd of Gay men, I saw some of post-Katrina New Orleans as I walked down Dauphine Street, away from French Quarter tourist-glitter and towards the devastated Ninth Ward on a course set for Lazarus House.

The city has been bruised, but by no means is it beaten. Angie Denmon of Chisholm Productions, a sponsor of Halloween's in New Orleans, told me that I would be able to see "the soul of New Orleans." I didn't know what she meant until I saw the city at ground level while I was still sober. I'm not from the city. I've heard horror stories of violence and murder. It was not without a sense of caution that I undertook the pilgrimage to visit Lazarus on foot.

I'd been away from the Deep South for a long, long time. The lush vegetation, palm trees, and sense of architectural style slowly seeped into my consciousness. Elderly people smiled at me as I walked by, and greeted me in the Southern drawl that always reminds me of my kinfolk (my mother is from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and my father is from Macomb, Mississippi). Some buildings were in severe disrepair, but overall, New Orleans looked pretty damn good.

Before Katrina, predictions were that much of the city would be ruined if a massive hurricane breached the levees, and that tens of thousands of residents would die. Indeed, much of the city was ruined,

but fewer than 1,500 lost their lives. The vastly lower death toll had little to do with the painfully slow response of federal and state authorities. What the experts didn't take into account was that the people of New Orleans, rich and poor alike, would take care of each other.

Who saved New Orleans? New Orleans.

I came to Lazarus without an appointment. One of the occupants, an elderly gentleman with snow-white hair, was with me as we waited by the red front door for somebody to let us in. When I told him that I hoped I could see the place on such short notice, he advised me to sneak in. "Just pretend like you're staying here," he told me. My fears of rejection at the gate were unfounded. Unbeknownst to me, Eric Oleson had called earlier and left a message for me to stop by. He greeted me at the door and gave me a tour.

The main building is beautifully appointed, with hardwood floors, high ceilings, and nice furniture. The walls appear to have been freshly painted. One of the positive results of Katrina was a thorough and loving renovation. Eric assured me, however, that damage from Katrina was extensive.

Housing in Project Lazarus is divided into upstairs and downstairs sections in two buildings. Each occupant receives a room, which becomes their home, not just their sleeping quarters. There is a caretaker with them at all times who cooks the meals and makes sure everyone is OK. Art adorns the walls—lively, vibrant pieces that help contribute to an air of uplifting serenity.

But what really impressed me was the garden. Project Lazarus provides so much more than simply a place to shelter the body; it offers solace for the soul. I counted four different garden spaces, including one that is being fitted with a fountain. Cleanup from Katrina isn't complete, but about three-quarters of the garden area is beautifully restored and, I suspect, even improved. One of the garden spaces has a circuit labyrinth (a circular path for walking meditation that represents the spiritual pilgrimage to Jerusalem) patterned after the twelfth century-circuit labyrinth embedded in the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France. The garden area next to the main building also features a statue of St. Francis of Assisi. An abandoned church sits on adjacent property.

Many of the occupants of Lazarus House could have met the same fate as poor diseased Lazarus in Luke, left by the rich to die from neglect. But the gate of this beautiful place (which resembles a mansion of the rich much more than a haven for the poor) is open to those who can rightfully be considered among the most helpless and hopeless in all of New Orleans. And it is thanks to the rich and not-so-rich that it can do so. For some who have no family or means of support, this means they have a place to live out their lives in an environment

of community and love. Some stay for only a few months, giving their families a much-needed break from having to provide constant care. Others are there to die.

When it comes time for members of the Lazarus family to pass on, hospice care is provided. Lazarus House provides round-the-clock companionship for the terminally ill during the last hours of life. After they die, a candle is lit in their room; flowers often mark the passage as well.

Pre-Katrina Lazarus House took care of about a third of all AIDS housing in New Orleans. After the devastation, funding fell drastically short, the property was in shambles, and the program was in serious straits. But with the help of the Gay community and its allies, Lazarus has been resurrected. Very soon, it will increase its occupancy from twenty to twenty-four if enough funding comes in. Much of Project Lazarus's future depends on the success of the Halloween's in New Orleans Circuit party weekend for much-needed revenue.[1]

Lazarus House sits on property owned by the Roman Catholic Church. The president of the board of directors is, in fact, Archbishop Alfred Hughes. The archbishop visits Lazarus at least twice a year.

Project Lazarus began with the AIDS epidemic as some Franciscan priests in that same location began to care for a few people with AIDS who had nowhere else to go. These priests refused to let people die at their gate. Since then, church authorities and members of the LGBTQ community have put aside their differences to help people with AIDS. It's a good fit.

I was raised Roman Catholic. It troubles me that the church of my youth has been so negative in its attitude toward those who are Gay like me. Much of the negativity exists at the official level; there is often more tolerance and mutual respect apparent at the local level. Just as there are tons of Gay priests and nuns who continue to function in a church that officially refuses to acknowledge them, there are also more than a few ordinary Gay Catholics who stubbornly hang on to their faith despite the rhetoric of condemnation coming from both sides. Project Lazarus is common ground, a peaceful haven for truce in which the angels of our better nature sing together in harmony to uplift those who have nowhere else to turn.

In that same Lazarus garden with a circuit labyrinth that takes the faithful to mystical Jerusalem, there is a plaque commemorating a

1. Oleson told me that Halloween's in New Orleans 2007 had raised $100,000 for Project Lazarus, about 10 percent of their budget (interview, December 2007). Although that sum was substantially lower than pre-Katrina parties ($300,000), it was higher than 2006 ($75,000). If the trend continues, it will only be a few more years before the event raises as much money as it had before.

Circuit party that draws Circuiteers to magical New Orleans:

1999 LOVE GENEROSITY FELLOWSHIP GOODWILL
DEDICATED TO THE HOSTS
"HALLOWEEN'S IN NEW ORLEANS"

There is a rumor that the archbishop himself blesses the annual event; I cannot confirm or deny that rumor. It is obvious, however, that the people in charge of Halloween's in New Orleans have the respect and esteem of the archdiocese, the LGBTQ community, and the Lazarus residents.

My first taste of Halloween's in New Orleans was Friday night, October 26. The party was held in the New Orleans Audubon Aquarium of the Americas. In 2005, the aquarium was hit hard by Hurricane Katrina. The actual building was fine, but the animals within it were in danger. Electricity was compromised, and the residents that could be moved on short notice, including its penguins and otters, were evacuated. Most of the 10,000 animals that remained did not survive, but the aquarium recovered. Nine months after the disaster, the penguins and otters were welcomed back from their exile in Monterey, California, with music, dancing, and a triumphant walk down a purple carpet.

A year later, music and dancing would also welcome Gay celebrants to the fully functional Aquarium of the Americas, now equipped with much better electrical power back-up.

In the most successful Circuit weekends, official events tend to be more than just dance parties. In the case of that Friday night in NOLA, living sharks, jellyfish, and all kinds of maritime wonders dazzled the eye, with the occasional go-go boy added for good measure. There was also an art auction to raise money for Project Lazarus.

The music was soulful and upbeat. Drinks were free, an unusual thing for a Circuit event. Few people were dressed for hardcore dancing; most wore formal attire more appropriate for eating, auctioning, and networking. As fun as the event and the crowd were at the aquarium, I was restless for a full-blown Circuit dance-a-thon. The real dance floor action didn't start until the party at the aquarium ended. The crowd that was still able to function (these people *drink*) went to Oz, Bourbon Pub, and other Gay establishments in the French Quarter, perhaps three-quarters of a mile away.

Oz and the Bourbon Pub featured eye candy and renowned disc jockeys. Go-go boys were in both venues all weekend, as were some well-known DJs in the Circuit, including Joe Gauthreaux, Susan Morabito, Lydia Prim, and Kimberly S. Since official weekend passes included only Oz events, however, the majority of revelers went to Oz, which was unbelievably crowded. Worn out from my first day in the city, I saved my energy and went home.

Mickey Weems

Lizard-costumed crew at Halloween's in New Orleans 2007

The main event/masquerade, Wild Kingdom, was held the next evening at the Sugar Mill, a large warehouse-like building with plenty of courtyard space. The décor and costumes were among the best I've seen at a Circuit event. Shirtless jungle-men with long spears were there to greet revelers. A similarly-dressed hottie was beating a huge drum like he was swinging a sledgehammer. A blond, ferocious feral twink was restrained with white binding on all four of his outstretched limbs at the entrance. There was also a shaved-head monkey boy. Once inside, a beautifully dressed African-esque drum ensemble performed in the courtyard in front of the auditorium. A large stage was decorated in jungle theme; masked performers on stilts paraded around the dance floor.

Whoever designed the outfits for the drummers and the stilt walkers did their homework—the style had a dignified African feel to it, not just the usual Tarzan trope such as that worn by the guys at the entrance. It is deceptively easy for such a theme as Wild Kingdom to carry racist overtones by associating "Africa" too strongly with "primitive." This party's planners struck a nice balance between sexy,

Mickey Weems

DJ Tony Moran at Halloween's in New Orleans, 2007

respectful, and humorous in its vision of a tropical fantasy. The overall effect was impressive.

What was even more impressive was the fact that beverages were free. I have witnessed this only once before, at Birmingham, Alabama's Rites of Spring. Southern hospitality at its best! After watching bottled water prices rise to dizzying heights ($8 in Miami last March), Wild Kingdom was a refreshing change. Liquor was provided free of charge for the aquarium party, the main event, and the Sunday brunch by Oz nightclub. I talked to Johnny Chisholm, the owner of Oz, about this, and he takes no credit for his generosity. "Mark McKeown [president of Halloween's in New Orleans] and the volunteers work their butts off to make it happen. They deserve all the credit," he said.

As spectacular as the cast and crew of Wild Kingdom were, the real show was the revelers. Many friends came together and dressed alike. Zebra men, satyrs, Peking ducks, bat guys, green lizard dudes, Aztec warriors, sari-clad people (lampooning Louisiana's newly-elected

Indian American governor, Bobby Jindal),[2] and plenty of colorful tribal outfits sparkled and danced together. MedEvent was also there in their distinctive red and white shirts.DJ Tony Moran provided the sonic background, a deep, tribal, big-room sound.

The high point of the evening was the costume contest. Whoever had the guts could come onstage and strut their stuff. The costume contest was one of the best examples of a Circuit event focusing on the crowd as the main attraction that I have seen since the now-defunct Columbus Red Party, where its founder and spiritual guide, Corbett Reynolds, would personally escort attendees in fabulous costumes to dance boxes and incorporate them directly into the entertainment.

As good as the show was (both on and offstage), there was something missing. Costumes are fun, but they tend to dampen the enthusiasm for dancing. Even I was affected—my mask and the feathers on my armbands kept going askew and sabotaging my groove.

Afterwards, back to Oz. But it was just as slammed as the night before, so I went to Bourbon Pub and danced to the music of DJ Lydia Prim, where I witnessed a Ballroom House of young African American men perform *runway* (walking in the manner of a professional model) through a crowd that was oblivious to their performance-within-a-performance. I would see runway at the pool party in Miami a month later.

DJ Lydia has been gone from the scene for a while. It was good to have her back again, both in terms of her great personality and the highly-syncopated music she played. A few hours later, I went to a Sunday brunch at House of Blues (featuring R&B singer Mary Griffin and, once again, free drinks), and then crashed for a few hours more before my last chance to dance.

I arrived in Oz at around 6:00 PM Sunday evening. DJ Joe Gauthreaux was playing deep house and gospel house music, his trademark sound. Those of us who were there to dance rather than pack the floor like Gay sardines were ecstatic. There was room to move before the masses made their entrance. As the evening went on, Oz was once again packed but not to the extremes of the nights before. The conditions were just right: it was the last night of a party weekend, the DJ was on, the crowd was relaxed, and drink prices were reasonable.

The evening turned into a full-fledged Circuit party in the best of the tradition. Joe took the crowd through a musical journey with a variety of styles, vocals, and rhythms. Most every man was shirtless. There were people from all over the United States, but Texas was all over the place—Rich Hill and the crew from Dallas Purple Party were there in force. People started talking to perfect strangers, sometimes to

2. Piyush "Bobby" Jindal.

flirt, but more often than not, just for the fellowship. Barriers between participants dropped to a degree I have not witnessed for a very long time. There was not, however, a corresponding dropping of pants. This wasn't a Southern Decadence pig-fest.[3] Men were not dropping to their knees, bending over, or showing sack.[4] The vibe was sexy but not sexual.

The average age of the crowd was probably thirty, a bit younger than the age of the average Circuiteer (thirty-two years), but more than a few guys were forty and over. There were the prerequisite pretty boys; many of them outshined the omnipresent strippers who'd been bumping and grinding almost nonstop all weekend atop the bar in the next room. But the greater beauty, the beauty of men and women joyfully in motion together, could be seen in just about all who were present, regardless of their looks, gender, or age.

People were dancing! They were dancing on the mezzanine, in the upstairs bar, in line for the bathroom. At one point, even Johnny Chisholm and his partner Cy Whitney hit the dance floor.

The fact that the closing party of this event had plenty of men who are thirty and under is a clear sign that the Circuit is attracting new blood. This was in New Orleans, no less, a city that had been pronounced doomed. The fact that Halloween's in New Orleans keeps Project Lazarus going added to the sense of camaraderie and unity that I felt on Sunday night. Participants knew their money was going for a great cause.

Another noticeable feature was the performance of *muscle camp*, hilarious performance of stereotypically faggish behavior by well-built men. I saw this several times over the weekend: a group of muscle queens would nelly out (adopt effeminate mannerisms) while they were dancing. The humorous contrast between how they looked and how they acted got them a lot of positive attention. This in turn lowered the barriers of separation between participants, allowing everyone around them to relax their guard and have fun.

I didn't see anybody get messy. It was not a fall-out GHB disaster like Circuit parties just a few years ago. More importantly, *everybody called it a Circuit party*!

White Party Miami: From Cat Fight to One Big, Happy Family

On November 24, 2007, I flew in at noon from CMH (Columbus, Ohio) to MIA (Miami, Florida) and was picked up by Shane Rogers, events coordinator, who explained to me that the city was coming together as

3. A "pig" is a man who is shamelessly and often publicly sexual.
4. "Sack" is scrotum.

one big, happy family rather than one big cat fight. They had common cause: White Party Miami would raise serious cash for Care Resource, a charity in the South Florida that does medical research on AIDS and provides services for HIV-positive people. A dozen or so different venues and some twenty DJs were making it happen.

The pool party at host hotel Surfcomber, in the heart of SOBE, had just begun when I got there. I walked out of my hotel room and into a warm, sunny day that my native Columbus, Ohio, would not see again for at least five months.

The crowd was ready to go. DJ Abel had gotten them all jazzed up the night before at Hilton Wolman's White Party-sponsored event in the Miami hotspot Karu and Y. A harbinger of what was to come, reports came in about a party that exceeded all expectations, including how many people would actually show up.

High numbers at events are a mixed blessing, especially for fundraisers. More people attending the parties mean more money for the sick. They also create a challenge for the people in charge, who must walk a fine line between having a packed house and an obnoxiously slammed one. Those of us in the scene know that many Circuit boys don't consider the party to be a success unless they are up in each other's space like a box full of crackers. But let it get too packed—and even worse, let it get so bad that the fire marshals stop letting people in—and a party's reputation can be ruined. The numbers for the next year will be lukewarm.

Friday night was a success, although the numbers caused some concern. The real challenge would be for the rest of the weekend.

Back to the Surfcomber pool party. The crowd came in, a steady stream of men and women from all over the United States. DJ Wendy Hunt spun a set with plenty of sunshine in it to match the day and the crowd's energy. One would expect that, after being worked by Abel just scant hours before, they would have enough sense to get more rest. But dancing feet are blissfully clueless to the demands of the rest of the body.

The crowd was the typical group of professionals, porn stars, and women (both Straight and Gay) that support Circuit events in Miami, with plenty of hotties, Speedos, and that sense of reserve that permeates Dade County. But that reserve was scattered by the sea breeze as Wendy got them going.

Dancing was far from restricted to the designated raised square on the east end of the pool. At one point, a barefoot group of four men performed runway at the north end of the pool, adding handsprings and flips in a hilarious display of muscle camp as they sauntered to and fro, often with cocktails in hand. A life preserver and a rescue hook were accessorized until hotel management stepped in.

Wendy's groove came to a screeching halt when a show, featuring a beautiful Latina singer, some live drummers, and handsome backup dancers, did a couple of salsa/reggaeton songs, complete with a well-muscled man on a mike telling us to "Make some noise!" The singer was talented, her dancers were hot, and the drummers were good. But the show was out of sync with the sound that Wendy Hunt had carefully built, and the spirit of the crowd came crashing down as all but a few chose to ignore the live music that had been so abruptly thrown at them.

A Circuit party is primarily about dance. Any performance should be sharp, to the point, and quick. It should mix in and out of the DJ's set, not stop the set dead in its tracks. Recovery took a while, but soon Wendy had the crowd right back where she wanted them.

The actual White Party was held that evening at the Viscaya Mansion from 6:30 to around 11:30 PM. Viscaya is a true chateau of grand proportions with formal gardens and situated right on the bay. The extravagant setting of the Viscaya makes the White Party the queen of all Circuit events. Tables were set up all along the length of the formal gardens with samplers from fine-dining restaurants in town.

But it wasn't just the physical setting. The elegance of the soiree also was evident in the crowd. Most people got into the spirit of the party and went out of their way to dress up in white. About a quarter of the crowd wore elaborate costumes.

DJ Warren Gluck, a man whose musical experience hearkens to the days of the Saint, was setting the musical pace. The soundscape he created was a delightful marriage of beauty and the beats ranging from luscious vocals and orchestration (including Johnny Mathis singing a disco version of "Begin the Beguine") to pulsing Latin hip-shakers. It was a pleasure to see a DJ get so much out of the crowd. Warren was having the time of his life, and the crowd responded favorably.

The mood was dampened somewhat when the guest star of the evening, pop singer Cindy Lauper, was almost an hour late with her performance. People who had come to the event to see her lined up against the stage about forty-five minutes before she was due to perform, and their impatience grew as the minutes past her scheduled appearance time slowly ticked by.

I was prepared for Warren's dance music and the rich mood he produced to end as soon as Ms. Lauper hit the stage. Big names seldom curb their egos to the will of a predominantly dancing crowd, though I must add that Cindy's antics and talents made for a good show. Warren followed Cindy's escapades with the Moody Blues's classic, "Nights in White Satin," a song that fit with the splendor of the evening. Since Cindy had come onstage so late in the evening (there was only a half

hour left to play instead of two hours), Warren had precious little time to bring his crowd back.

The next event was held at the new Stereo in Miami. The crowd quickly did a disco change of clothing (or didn't) and in no time at all, the place was slammed wall-to-wall. There was an issue with the long line of people waiting an eternity to get in, so Shane Rogers made the decision to open the VIP section to everyone to alleviate overcrowding and allow more patrons inside.

DJ Joe Gauthreaux proved his depth in music by setting up the crowd with harder tracks than he usually chooses. I left the club at 3:30 AM, spent from everything I had done earlier.

The central focus of White Party weekend has traditionally been the elegant Viscaya Mansion on Saturday night. It seems, however, that the main event is now the Muscle Beach party on Sunday afternoon on Twelfth Avenue beach in SOBE.

I took the fifteen-minute walk from the Surfcomber to the daytime outdoor party on Sunday afternoon, which went from 1:00 to 8:00 PM. The sound system—a real challenge in such an open space—was superb, as was the weather: blue sky, fluffy white clouds (not too big), and a refreshing breeze. The space was a huge rectangle enclosed by a six-foot chain link fence. As with other major beach parties, the dance floor sat atop the sand within a huge metal frame. Large pieces of fabric stretched over portions of the frame's top, and massive decorations swayed in the sea breeze. The DJ booth was about six feet off the sand.

DJ Roland Belmares spun the party. He is renowned for a happy, energetic sound, one that would match the sunshine and blue skies, and that's what we got.

I did notice a difference in this party from past Circuit events held on the beach at Twelfth Avenue. A few years back, onlookers who would stare at the party from outside of the fence were overwhelmingly female. Not many Straight men would dare cast their gaze into such a party for more than a second before quickly looking away. Curiosity might mean they were Gay. Nowadays, however, seems like plenty of men as well as women were not afraid to be seen looking at such a grand Gay event held in broad daylight. This is a good sign.

Soon after sunset, celestial lighting kicked in as the full moon rose from the sea. The party ended with a white fireworks display that went on for eight solid minutes—well, for the first seven. The last minute or so was multiple colors.

A quick disco nap and we were off to the freshly renovated Cameo Nightclub. DJ Tony Moran gave us an evening of polyrhythmic tribal with occasional vocals. The masses came in and filled this large venue

and packed the main dance floor way beyond what I could tolerate, so I danced at the margins. The crowd was beautiful and a bit edgy (a significant minority of muscle queens had left their manners at home), but lots of fun when Tony made them climax.

The upstairs bar featured DJ Michael Tank for those who didn't want to do the sardine dance on the main floor. While upstairs with Michael Tank, I cavorted with a young, curly-haired man from Alaska, who bounced around, smiling from ear to ear, all the while letting out an occasional "WOOOO!" much to the surprise of fashionistas who would never be caught dead smiling at imperfect strangers on the dance floor but couldn't keep their eyes off him for being the center of attention. He was cute, but more importantly, he was incandescent with energy for anyone who wanted it.

The after-hours club on Monday morning was in Miami's club district, about a twenty-five-minute cab ride from SOBE. All the clubs in that area can be open twenty-four hours. The staff at Studio A was friendly and enthusiastic about participating in the White Party. Three DJs were hired for a ten-hour dance-a-thon from 6:00 AM to 4:00 PM: Power Infiniti, Paulo, and Alyson Calagna. All played different kinds of music, making the ten hours into a series of interesting journeys, a soundtrack for adventures, encounters, and shifting loyalties as Gay men play "Who Wants Me?"

One can follow the course of a party as its dynamics morph. Impromptu rules are forged through mutual consent, crystallized, and will eventually fall apart. Every time the DJ shifts gears or, in this case, when the party shifts DJs, the crowd has the opportunity to change its collective mind. It can become friendly or reserved.

The crowd reacted in a typical pattern that is the signature of the last function of a Circuit *tweekend*. People first come into the venue, anxious to see who else will show up. Most everyone has seen each other some time during previous dance sessions. Faces of those who have not yet been introduced take on some familiarity. People dance, joke, and laugh together. But once a pecking order is set, groups crystallize. Powerful hierarchical rules of a more brutally honest nature emerge as individuals find themselves fixed in roles that dictate who can pay attention to whom. Aware of the possibilities that can get one status as well as physical pleasure, many men are willing to "trade up," abandon a sure thing with a cutie in order to hook up with a hottie.

I witnessed all of these dynamics that morning as Power Infiniti, Paulo, and Alyson Calagna added their own love to the currents of passion, friendship, and anxiety.

Dressed in a glamorous outfit that revealed his streamlined muscularity, Power had a headdress anchored on top of his shaved ebony

head. With a serious demeanor on his face, intense and almost intimidating, he played a set that was technically progressive but still very much tribal. Later on, he came back on stage while Paulo was spinning, a feathered whirlwind to rouse a crowd that still had a few more hours of dance in it.

Few DJs carry themselves with more serene confidence than Paulo. His powerful musculature complements an equally powerful mind. Paulo played his signature tribal sound, interweaving tracks with precision, and watched the crowd build. Paulo (a.k.a. the Tribal Bitch) may not jump up and down when he is on, but his beatific smile radiates unfiltered joy.

During Paulo's set, Alan T got onstage and performed one of his tracks with fierce nelliness. Alan is a man with few pretensions. Possessing a fit physique unencumbered by 'roid-induced bulk and flaunting his faggotry with style and outrageous humor, Alan T mocks body fascist clone insecurities by getting coveted attention without looking like an over-inflated gym bunny. The high point of Alan's performance was when he grabbed DJ Alyson Calagna and pulled her onstage. Alyson did herself proud and proceeded to work the house with her own dance moves.

And speaking of Alyson: the woman's set was basic house, just what the predominantly younger crowd wanted to hear. More than a few of them appeared to be there just to see her, revealing a strong cadre of *Calagnaddicts*.

By 4:00 PM, the crowd was smaller, more intimate, and still energized. Baby-faced crack children vied for the spotlight, challenging each other with graceful skill, whirling, striking, laughing, camping—a pleasure to watch.

The most valuable gift to the White Party has been strong leadership that has united the fractured Miami scene for a good cause. There were almost no competing parties. In a scene where drama is as much a part of its fabric as music and dancing, Miami had a weekend with no major hitches. I congratulated Shane Rogers and his husband, Victor Mauro, for a series of great parties. Rogers shrugged it off: "We did not do it alone. It's a wonderful thing when the community comes together for a cause. When this happens, success will always be a given" (interview, January 2008).

Commentary: Blake Baker

Dallas
December 2007

Attending both Halloween's in New Orleans and White Party Miami in 2007, I was fortunate enough to witness firsthand what amazing feats can be accomplished when communities work together for a common good. As a member of a charity organization in Dallas [Purple Foundation, the organization responsible for the Dallas Purple Party], I have seen all too often the consequences that result when people are selfish, with their own agendas as the priority.

Originally from south Louisiana, I have been to New Orleans hundreds of times during my life. New Orleans always had something magical about it. Maybe it was the history of the old city, the way that people always went completely wild there, or maybe it was that distinct smell. Regardless of exactly what it is, it is a place that has given me some unbelievable memories. This past Halloween was no different.

It was truly remarkable to see the progress New Orleans has made rebuilding itself from the devastation of Katrina. Though most of the French Quarter was spared from the worst of the storm, it hurt the people of New Orleans in ways most people could never understand. But as Mickey said, New Orleans is back! It was incredible to see the attendance at almost pre-Katrina numbers. The weather was nice, the parties were great, the men were hot, and most importantly of all, the crowd was friendly. There was little drama and little attitude. It's as if everyone was there to just have a good time. Thankfully, I had a whole month to rest up before White Party.

As we began making our arrangements for White Party Miami a few months before, I couldn't help think back to 2006, my first White Party. I had always heard about the "Crown Jewel of the Circuit," reading about it in *Circuit Noize*, looking at the hundreds of pictures online. But to say it was a disappointment is an understatement. And by the way, who throws competing parties against charity events? Don't they realize that they are taking money away from people that *really* need it? So I really wasn't looking forward to White Party this year.

But I am excited to report White Party Miami is once again the Crown Jewel of the Circuit. I was blown away at how Care Resource has done a complete 180–degree change from last year, and everyone agreed. Attendance was incredible. After last year's disappointment, I was scared people were not going to give White Party another chance,

but the boys came in masses. Every event (yes, I went to them all) ran very smoothly—beautiful venues, great music and lighting.

The Circuit has changed in many ways in my almost ten years as a Circuit boy. I still remember my first party, Halloween's in New Orleans 1999. It was such an incredible experience. The costumes, the decorations, the MEN! For the first time in my life, I felt like I was part of something, a feeling I couldn't explain, but I loved it. Now, several years and many parties later, I still get that excited feeling walking into a party, the way my heart starts beating fast when I can hear the "thump, thump, thump" as I walk into place with hundreds, sometimes thousands of shirtless sweaty men holding on to each other, shoulder to shoulder, all bouncing to the same beat. It's like we are all some ancient tribe doing a ceremonial mating dance. It is, however, much, much more than sex and drugs—it's a truly spiritual experience.

Julie Milford

DJ Pride (Yvette Fernandez) spinning at a Disney Gay Days women's dance event, Girls in Wonderland

Part 3

Pulse

Dale Stine

DJ Pride promo shot

Chapter 10

Popular Dance

If I can't dance, it's not my revolution.

—Attributed to Emma Goldman[1]

Dance and LGBTQ history go together. From molly house to drag ball to rent party, same-sex dancing inspired persecution by the state but also promoted solidarity among those within the outlaw community for hundreds of years. During Stonewall and its aftermath, dance accompanied, sustained, and accelerated liberation. The AIDS epidemic dampened the fervor for dance but did not extinguish it, as people danced to remember the dead, celebrate the living, and raise money for the sick.

Masculine nonviolence and spiritual transcendence are not simply mental constructs or ethical principles; they are performed and experienced through bodies that interact with each other in bars, on the street, in bedrooms, and on the dance floor.

The evolution of popular dance from colonial America to the Gay men's Circuit is a movement from scripted, regulated performance to unscripted, fluid individual expression. This movement reflects tensions between acceptable and outlaw entertainment, informal and staged performance, African and European sensibilities, and Gay/Straight festive culture.

1. This popular saying attributed to Goldman is probably distilled from the following quote in her autobiography, *Living My Life*: "At the dances I was one of the most untiring and gayest. One evening a cousin of Sasha, a young boy, took me aside. With a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade, he whispered to me that it did not behoove an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon, anyway.... I grew furious at the impudent interference of the boy. I told him to mind his own business.... I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from convention and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy.... If it meant that, I did not want it" (56).

Most of the earliest popular dances recorded and preserved from colonial American culture[2] have two major cultural sources: African and European. African American dance trends, which incorporated both African and European sensibilities, influenced (and would eventually replace) social dances from Europe.

Western Europeans and their descendants in colonial America usually relegated social dance to festivals. However, they did not incorporate it into religious ritual. They saw dance as a leisure activity—expressive, fun, nonproductive, frivolous, and suspiciously sinful—especially when the stern ethics of the Protestant Reformation concerning the body and physical pleasure as sources of sin took hold.

Initially, European-based formal dances in colonial America required equal numbers of men and women as complementary teams that would interact, pair up, and exchange partners in reels, cotillions, minuets, quadrilles, and square dances. Among the less formal dances, jigs and clogging could be danced alone or in pairs.

African American cultural sensibilities, however, tend to link dance to the highest possible spiritual experience a human being could have. In classical African[3] religious traditions, the gods dance in consecrated human bodies. When African Americans were forced to abandon their beloved deities and adopt Christianity, they still held on to the means by which they accessed the divine through rhythmic movement, percussion, and song.[4] Just as many forms of popular American music can be traced to African American gospel roots, the inspiration for the myriad dance styles developed in the last hundred or so years can be traced to a deeply felt connection between body, spirit, and rhythm that comes from Africa.[5]

In *Steppin' on the Blues*, Jacqui Malone gives the following description of Black dance:

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2. This short history of dance has no pretensions of being anywhere near complete. The dances I mention reflect only those forms that have survived in the historical record. It does not include American Indian influences, which no doubt were there, but are nearly impossible to pinpoint.
3. Ninian Smart, a renowned scholar of world religions, uses the terms "classical African religions" (traditional African religions) and "Greater Africa" (African culture found in the New World) (346, 344). I will also use these terms.
4. More about African and African American spirituality will be said in the next chapter.
5. People with refined rhythmic sensibilities, regardless of race or ethnic background, tend to raise children with those same sensibilities. I do not believe that genetics plays a significant role in determining if somebody "has rhythm." It is possible that education of rhythm is passed on to the child by the movements of its mother and other caretakers as they hold it, sing to it, and play with it. This education begins at birth or perhaps even earlier, while the child is still in the womb. I see it as a culture-based pedagogy that is more prevalent in some groups and families than in others.

> African American dance serves some of the same purposes as traditional dances in western and central African cultures: on both continents black dance is a source of energy, joy, and inspiration; a spiritual antidote to oppression; and a way to lighten work, teach social values, and strengthen institutions. It also teaches the unity of mind and body and regenerates mental and physical power. The role of dance as a regenerative force is echoed in the words of Bessie Jones of the Georgia Sea Islands: "We'd sing different songs, and then we'd dance a while to rest ourselves."(24)

Unfortunately, there is not much information on the African roots of American dance because there is almost no record exactly how Africans in the Colonies danced. Malone concedes that little can be said with certainty about what African American dance was like before the twentieth century, all the while asserting the importance of African kinesthetic impact on contemporary African Americans:

> Although visual source materials are not available to trace with accuracy the evolution of African American dances in the United States during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, certain movement patterns, gestures, attitudes, and stylizations present in the body language of contemporary black Americans are assertive proof of African influences. [Olly Wilson says that] African Americans "refine all movement in the direction of dance-beat elegance. Their work movements become dance movements and so do their play movements; and so, indeed, do all the movements they use every day, including the way they walk, stand, turn, wave, shake hands, reach, or make any gesture at all." (24)

For centuries, stigma associated with African influences has kept scholars from giving African American dance its due as an important feature of American culture. Language that describes the casual genius of movement preserved and regenerated within the African American community has yet to be standardized.

Within the Black African cultural context, the use of dance to invoke spiritual experiences and individual expression is not deviance from the communal norm but affirmation of divine inspiration. But preservation of any one African culture was undermined in the English settlements from Newfoundland to Georgia. Africans in America found themselves thrown into a collective of many different cultures from Mali to Angola (and perhaps a few from Mozambique, Madagascar, and Zanzibar). A vast range of gods, rhythms, and expressions of movement would arise when people danced together. Condemnation of their sacred religions by their oppressors would have disrupted the routine education of the young in all areas of ritual, including dance. Within a few generations,

innovations would logically appear with greater frequency because there would no longer be distinct institutions of classical African culture to certify what was proper.

European colonists exposed Africans to less sophisticated dances and often forced them to give up their own dances. It was inevitable that, given their cultural heritage, the servants would quickly outshine the masters. Malone quotes Ralph Ellison:

> The slaves first sensed it. They sensed it when they looked at the people in the big house dancing their American versions of European social dances. And they first mocked them—and then they decided, coming from dancing cultures, that they could do them better. And then they went on to define what surely is the beginnings of an American choreography…. They had the freedom of experimentation, of trying things out… And in the doing, they found ways of making the human body move in stylized ways which were different. (38)

The Africanization of social dance and music occurred all over the New World where African immigrants settled in sufficient numbers. Nevertheless, the social hierarchy that kept most Africans and their descendants in slavery would *officially* devalue their culture and religion. Although Whites in colonial America would admire and imitate the dances of Blacks, they ostensibly based their popular dance on trends coming from Europe. Dance was culture, and *real* culture was seen as the exclusive domain of European-based institutions.

Because of this bias, we know much more about European dances in America before the twentieth century than African ones. Yet, characteristics of African dance are more influential in terms of today's popular dance. Kai Fikentscher says the African sensibilities became dominant about 1910: "The European imprint on American social dance seems to have diminished for good" at that time (24). African-based dances were often danced with the group but without a partner, and, as mentioned earlier, a higher premium was placed on personal innovation-through-inspiration rather than rigidly prescribed movement. A few African American dances from early American history have survived in the record, and we see traits in them that are present in popular dance today, most notably individual expression. The ring shout had spiritual connotations; it featured innovative dancing while moving in a circle with other celebrants.[6] The cakewalk, a secular dance, was likewise innovative, but originated with the satirical humor of the oppressed mocking the oppressor:

6. Dancing in moving circles is also a trait of many Native American dances. We may find that the ring dance has Native American roots as well as African.

> As a product of black folk culture, the cakewalk remains obscure in origin. Perhaps with African roots, it developed on plantations sometime before the Civil War, as slaves imitated the Grand March that concluded the cotillions and fancy balls given by whites. Although plantation owners often mistook the dance for childlike play, the cakewalk in fact had a satirical purpose. Promenading in pairs, dancers crossed their arms, arched their backs, threw back their heads, and strutted with exaggerated kicks. (Appiah and Gates 121)[7]

One European style that blended with African sensibilities was the jig. In colonial Williamsburg, the "Negro jig" apparently was a favorite at one time (Southern 44). The influx of dancing masters from France at this time to train the White folk in the formal requirements of the minuet, the grand march, and other courtly dances may have been a reaction to the Africanization of dance. In the long run, however, these attempts at European sophistication provided more material for African Americans to lampoon and incorporate into their own dances,[8] which in turn were incorporated into mainstream dances by the rest of the population.

There was also a countermovement to have dancing banned. For a significant number of White Christians, dance was evil, or at least highly suspect. All of the aforementioned dances in this chapter, European- and African-based, were condemned at some point by Christian religious authorities, Catholic as well as Protestant.[9]

Until the early twentieth century, dance styles were wedded to specific types of music. "Reel," "quadrille," "waltz," "polka," and "jig" refer to a type of dance and the music appropriate for that dance. People would reel to reels, dance a waltz when a waltz was played, polka to polka songs, and do the jig when they heard a jig. One reason for this was the rich variety of tempos and rhythm patterns available in the social dances of those times. Quadrilles, for example, could be in 2/4 and 6/8 time, while waltzes are in 3/4 time.

Time signatures, such as 2/4, 4/4, 3/4, and 6/8 determine the pulse of a song. By "pulse," I mean the way in which certain beats in a song's rhythm feel stronger than others. In turn, the pulse of a song influences how people dance to it. Because they are more than a little subjective,

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7. Unlike any other form of African American dance from colonial times, there is plenty of material on the cakewalk because minstrel shows preserved it; the cakewalk became an international dance craze in the late 1800s.
8. When I attended Berea College in Kentucky (1976–1981), African American classmates had a new dance that mocked European American men. They called it "the White boy."
9. A notable Christian exception would be the Shakers, who incorporated sacred dance into their worship services.

time signatures are not easy to explain, so I will do so from the standpoint of the dancer rather than the musician.[10]

Only the first number in the time signature is important to the dancer. A song done in 2/4 time is used for marching because the pulse hits every two beats. A march consists of two steps. The pulse is stronger on the first step rather than the second, as in "one, two, one, two," etc. In the United States military, this translates into stepping forward, left foot first: "left, right, left, right." The number 3 in 3/4 time is also the number of steps for a waltz: "one, two, three, one, two, three." A signature beginning with 4 would stress the first of four beats: "one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four.[11]

One of the biggest changes in European popular dance occurred in the nineteenth century when people chose vigorous couples-dancing over the stylized couples-dancing of the minuet and highly choreographed team-dancing. A corresponding relaxation in dress (no more wigs for men, less complex hairstyles for women) came with the new freedom of movement that couples could enjoy (Casey 14–15).

The waltz revolutionized dance in the mid-1840s by separating couples from the group. It also allowed men and women to face each other and maintain physical contact for the duration of the dance.[12] The group no longer moved as one unit, but rather as many couples-units whose interaction was minimized to staying out of each other's way. Initially, the waltz was considered scandalous (Van Der Merwe 237–38), but popular acceptance soon normalized it. Team dancing would fall out of fashion.

The popularity of the waltz signaled a change in attitude toward courtship and flirting. Within the public sphere of communal dance, an unprecedented degree of intimacy and independence from the group was allowed between men and women as they danced as couples. These changes reflected (and promoted) an understanding of romance based on the love of individuals for each other, not family interests or community restrictions placed on women of whom they should marry. Nevertheless, a woman expected a man to approach her for a dance, not the other way around. Though not so rigorously followed today, this custom is still part of heteronormative dance protocol.

10. In musical terms, the 4 in 2/4 refers to what kind of note is used in a measure, which in this case would be quarter notes. The 2 refers to how many notes would be in a measure. In 6/8 time, the 8 means that eighth notes would be in the measure, with six notes per measure.
11. There is a further discussion of pulse in Chapter 12.
12. Face-to-face dancing did not originate with the waltz; it can be found in the cotilion, for example, but only for a limited portion of the dance.

Ragtime

The next big change after the waltz was the rise of ragtime music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Only a few years after Emancipation, African Americans began generating trend-setting moves of their own that would become all the rage in Europe as well as the United States. Ragtime, a highly syncopated musical style that helped streamline popular dance music to the discipline of the 4/4 count, marked the first big shift to African sensibilities in American culture. Pioneered by the African American community, "ragtime" was the name of the musical style, but the dances that accompanied ragtime had many names and forms, including old ones like the cakewalk and the polka, and new ones, such as the two-step, foxtrot, and slow drag (Berlin 14–15).

The multitude of dances that developed around ragtime music gained popularity because of three factors: improved communications and travel; the success of minstrel shows, vaudeville, cakewalks, and other Black-inspired performances (with or without actual Black people); and the ease by which different forms of movement coming out of the African American community could be adapted to the 4/4 count.

Ragtime marks the beginning of global movements in African American music and dance. The basic simplicity of 4/4 upon which complex musical arrangements could be placed and diverse dance moves could be performed would eventually lead to the highly individualized dance forms found in popular communal dance today. Even with ragtime, there was a premium placed on individual style that allowed for a wide range of kinesthetic expression harkening back to the ring shout, European jig, and Africanized jig.

Composers write most ragtime songs in 2/4 and 4/4. The resounding popularity of ragtime paved the way so that 4/4 would eventually become the universal time signature for dance music. 3/4 and 6/8 dance music would no longer be trendy from that point on. The dominance of 4/4 is such that it is called "common time."

Popular dancing in the ragtime era would require male-female couples, reflecting (and supporting) a quiet social revolution that began with the waltz. When ragtime became the rage, dancing in teams of men and women was already antiquated for most non-rural communities. LGBTQ folk would follow the "couple" format with one modification: they would introduce same-sex couples to underground dance culture.

Swing jazz[13] came into scandalous fashion in the 1920s. "Swing" refers to the music and the dances, although the name does little

13. "Jazz" has common linguistic roots with "jiz," slang for sperm (Jarrett 81).

justice to the splendid variety of dance steps that came out of the swing era, such as the shag ("shag" also means sexual intercourse),[14] jive, Charleston, tap,[15] and the still-popular lindy hop. One dance that came out of swing is the "jitterbug," which also refers to an alcoholic in an agitated state (*American Heritage* 730). This association between swing and intoxication illustrates its outlaw jazz roots and reflects the connections made between popular Africanized dance, sex, liquor, and illegal drugs (Goldberg 58).

Latin-Caribbean dances came into the U.S. club scene in the 1930s. They really made their mark on the national consciousness in the 1950s with the popularity of conga lines, merengue, cha-cha, mambo, and rumba. It is reasonable to assume that these dances brought with them a more relaxed attitude toward race in general (and Hispanics in particular) than swing and ragtime. Perhaps it was the popular perception of Latin as "Brown" (i.e., between Black and White) that permitted a greater degree of tolerance for interracial interaction.

Most people are not aware that forced migrations of African populations to the Americas and African religions also play a significant role in the development of Latin-Caribbean as well as African American dance. The conga drum is both a secular and a sacred instrument. "Mambo" is a title for a Vodoun priestess as well as a secular dance.[16] The major sites for the creation of these dance forms—Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico—also have communities that practice African religions.[17]

The rock and R&B (rhythm and blues) revolution individualized popular dance. Although most communal dance at this time was still done as opposite-sex couples, a new dance called the twist burst forth on the national scene out of the African American community.

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14. Like most swing dances, the shag originated in the African American community. It was considered at one time too sexual for its close body contact and suggestive moves, and was called the "dirty shag." The shag survives today as the folk dance of well-to-do White people in the Low Country of coastal North and South Carolina. In 1984, the South Carolina legislature passed a law designating the shag as the state dance (Gray et al 282).
15. Tap is considered to be a hybrid of African dancing sensibilities with the Irish jig. During the nineteenth century, African and Irish Americans often lived together in poor neighborhoods, and tap dancing is thought to be a result of that closeness (Neal and Forman 33).
16. In the popular 1960s television comedy, *I Love Lucy*, Cuban American actor and singer Desi Arnaz would sing out the sacred name of "Babalú, Bablúaye!" with his Cuban band, invoking the Lukumi-Santeria god of disease and healing. Of course, only those people familiar with African traditions knew to whom Arnaz was singing.
17. Anyone familiar with Cuban and Brazilian music knows the deep connection between African worship and popular musical styles and dances, such as salsa and samba.

Brewster and Broughton describe the importance of this dance and how it changed America:

> The twist caused a revolution because of its simplicity. It required no partner, no routine, no ritual, no training. All it needed was the right record and a loose set of limbs. It was an invocation to get on the floor and do your own thing. Because it wasn't a couple's dance, it struck a small blow for sexual equality—destroying the concept of "wallflower," a girl awaiting an invitation to dance (coincidentally, the Pill [birth control] and the twist were launched within months of each other). Most importantly, perhaps, it unified a group of dancers. Dance the twist and you were no longer just focused on your partner, you were partying with the whole room. (54)

The enthusiastic movements required for many of the new dances that followed the twist (such as the Watusi, the jerk, and the pony) eliminated constant physical contact with one's dance partner. Slow dancing to popular ballads, however, still required physical proximity and touching.

The 1950s and '60s also spawned line dances, an innovation where dancers would no longer couple up, but would form a line shoulder-to-shoulder and synchronize their movements with an identical pattern of steps. Same-sex couples-dancing for men was illegal in the United States when line dances became popular, as was couples-dancing between women that was overly sensual. Line dances were a fad that allowed people of the same sex to dance together. The Gay community may have started line dancing before anyone else for just that reason. Esther Newton says, "It is likely that the Madison, a line dance that became popular in America and Europe, was invented by [Gay residents of Cherry Grove, Fire Island] in the mid- to late fifties to get around the 'no dancing together' rule" (*Cherry Grove* 72).

Disco

R&B and rock music of the early 1960s brought forth disco, the first truly worldwide music-dance craze since the military march.[18]

The history of disco actually has three phases: psychedelia/Motown, disco, and house. In Manhattan during the early 1960s, certain clubs opened up that exclusively played recorded music rather than live bands. These venues were known as "discotheques," a place of discs or vinyl records. This trend arose at about the same time as two important musical styles: the psychedelic music movement in rock, and the

18. More about the military march as the first worldwide dance craze will be said later.

soul music revolution in R&B brought on by the Motown (from "Motor City" or Detroit) sound.

Both of these musical genres refer to the soul. "Psychedelia" is a term taken from two Greek words: *psyche* ("soul") and *delos* ("clear," "visible") (*American Heritage* 1104), which would translate as "soul vision," an oblique reference to altered states brought on by hallucinogenic drugs. Psychedelic and soul music have strong spiritual and outlaw roots, as did the hippie and black power movements that these genres inspired and reflected. Many songs from these soul-based musical styles were dance tunes.[19]

The 1960s were a time of experimentation with music, dance, drugs, spirituality, and social awareness. The substances that caused the most profound hallucinogenic experiences, such as LSD and psychoactive mushrooms, were also called "psychedelic." The close relationship between music and drugs is expressed in some of the lyrics of psychedelic rock (and some Motown soul songs) of the times. Outstanding examples in rock are "Purple Haze" by Jimi Hendrix, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" (LSD) by the Beatles, "Eight Miles High" by the Byrds, and "White Rabbit" by Jefferson Airplane. On the soul side, there was "Cloud Nine" by the Temptations. Discotheques were designed to enhance the psychedelic experience with flashing lights shining on the dance floor. By the mid-1960s, DJs in Manhattan and London discotheques did something that a traditional dance band could not do: they used dual turntables so that they could play one song after another without taking a break between songs. This technique of continuous music allows the dancers to enter into a sonically-driven altered state that could last for hours, a state that can be enhanced somewhat by alcohol, but more so by other recreational drugs that did not sabotage coordination as much.

It is in the discotheques of the early 1960s that dancing became completely individualized. Not only were people free to dance without touching, they no longer needed to coordinate their dance with anyone else, or even dance a recognizable step. The inspiration of movement was to come from within each person, and involved a very intimate relationship with the music. As with the twist, the rule of dance was "do your own thing." This was especially true with the psychedelia crowd, a predominantly European American bunch who, unlike the

19. On the psychedelia side, one need look no further than the music of the still-influential Grateful Dead. The vast majority of their songs were lengthy dance tunes, leisurely paced out and extended way beyond the 3 1/2-minute industry standard for rock songs. Brewster and Broughton go so far as to say, "The [Grateful] Dead did to rock music what the disco DJs would later do for dance music: they contorted it to within an inch of its life" (66).

African American Motown crew, was not particularly interested in generating new dance crazes. Individual movement was enshrined in the person of the go-go dancer, usually a scantily clad woman, who would dance on a box or stage by herself. Underground Gay male venues had, of course, go-go-boys, a tradition still going strong today at Gay male bars, Circuit parties, and strip joints.

When psychedelia and Motown began to fade at the beginning of the 1970s, so did the discotheque, at least for Straight people. The waning popularity of psychedelia coincided with trendsetters' rejection of the hippie, who was often negatively portrayed as stoned on drugs and belligerently anti-establishment. For men, the hippie was popularly caricaturized as a longhaired guy of questionable masculinity. The Gay crowd, however, was full of men who regularly did drugs, were automatically labeled as anti-establishment because of their sexual preference, and whose masculinity was suspect as a matter of course.

Gay men kept the tradition of the discotheque, but with some important modifications that transitioned smoothly from psychedelia and Motown to disco.

Two things came forth from the Gay community that prepared the way for the disco movement: a design for an improved discotheque (called the "disco") that was easily copied, and the DJ technique called the "slip-cue." According to Esther Newton, discos were patterned after a refurbished club on Fire Island in the summer of 1970 called the Ice Palace. Like the Manhattan and London discotheques a few years earlier, the Ice Palace had two turntables. Colored lights were set up, just as in discotheques. But this time, the lights were wired in sync with the sound system so that the lights would flash to the beat. Within weeks, another Gay club on Fire Island copied the pattern set by the Ice Palace (Newton 243–45). In only a few years, discos would open across America and on both sides of the Atlantic.

The second innovation was called "slip-cuing." This is a technique where the DJ synchronizes the beat of the song that is finishing with the beat of the new song in such a way that the transition occurs simultaneously on the *pulse*, the first beat of the 4–count. In other words, the pulse of the music can function like a heartbeat that is never interrupted. DJ Tom Moulton, one of the DJs credited as the inventor of the continuous mix[20] in the year 1974, describes the process:

> By carefully watching how people danced, I noticed that they would always finish the step. In other words, they would go one-two-three-four and then they would walk off the floor on the one beat. The trick

20. This claim to fame is a contested one. Other possible candidates include Francis Grasso and Terry Noel.

> was to get them to begin dancing to the next song before they realized it actually was another song. (Cheren 148)

Slip-cuing was made eminently easier with the rise of disco music. Although disco music is 4/4 with the pulse on the first beat, the genius of disco was to stress *every* beat in the same way that many marching bands use a bass drum. In other words, the disco 4/4 beat is underscored with a 1/4 deep-bass pulse: "boom, boom, boom, boom." This blending of 1/4 and 4/4 signatures is further enhanced by a high-treble counter-pulse between beats. It is the counter-pulse *tsssh* that gives disco its distinctive "boom-*tsssh*, boom-*tsssh*, boom-*tsssh*, boom-*tsssh*" sound. The result on the dance floor was a driving beat that made it easy for people to dance.

Disco songs usually have between 115–135 beats per minute, an energetic yet comfortable pace that is a bit faster than a march but not as fast as a jog. Everything from lush orchestral strings to complex African percussion could be layered into a song with a disco format. In addition, disco songs are highly regimented, like military marches. The tempo rarely changes during the course of a song. The regularity of the disco 4/4 signature, the narrow range of beats per minute, and the unchanging tempo make it easier for DJs to slip-cue songs together. These features also make the music exceptionally accessible to people from all ages and many different cultural backgrounds. Just about everyone, from the best dancers to the worst, could move to the music in a socially acceptable fashion. This would be especially important to the Gay male community, which is composed of people from many different cultures and needed music that was accessible to all.

When DJs in the Gay male community began slip-cuing songs together to form one continuous pulse over an entire evening, they were reinventing a trend in dance that was already used in marches and jigs. Marching bands will play one tune to the next without stopping. Irish jig songs are also strung together by traditional bands so that the dancing need not stop. But there are different reasons why marchers, jig-dancers, and Gay men in discotheques use continuous song sequences. Marches are played to keep soldiers[21] entertained as they move in tight formation for indefinite periods. The ultimate purpose of marches is to foster corporate unity with as little variation in movement within the team as possible. Irish jigs are played non-stop for contests of endurance. Rivals will challenge each other by dancing to exhaustion until only one is left.

21. This would also include those who imitate soldiers, such as nonmilitary marching bands for police and sports teams.

This is not to say that there are no pleasures in marching or jig-endurance contests. To march, to be in formation with one's fellows, moving together with such precision that every footstep hits the ground at precisely the same time, and listening to the sing-song of a jody call[22] or the steady cadence of a marching band is indeed pleasurable.[23] The same could be said for competing with one's fellows in an Irish jig contest, overcoming fatigue, weaving one's movements around the rhythm and melody of the song, and pushing the body to its limits.

Unlike marching in unison to maintain military discipline or dancing jigs to outlast competitors, continuous mixing in Gay clubs originated solely for the build-up and prolongation of pleasure that is felt by as many people as possible as they move together into an altered state of shared communal identity. In this manner, the Gay male dance movement continues African traditions of nonstop drumming and singing to facilitate the production of spiritual trances (which are extremely pleasurable) in the dancers and enhance the experience of watching spirit-inspired dancers for the spectators.[24] The focus on pleasure and altered states bordering on the spiritual are the main reasons why disco and underground dance culture caught on worldwide, and why they (and classical African religious traditions) are condemned.

Different dances came forth with disco, including line dances such as the bus stop and novelty dances like the bump. Some swing dances also re-emerged, and salsa made its debut (disco had some definite Latin impulses as well), but the old '60s psychedelia "do your own thing" ethos of individual expression as the preferred aesthetic was the general rule.

Disco eventually fell out of favor with the Straight crowd. Like psychedelia, it was associated with illegal drugs and questionable masculinity. But disco never really died out in the Gay male community. Jimmy Ruffin's "Hold On (To My Love)" and Viola Wills's cover of Gordon Lightfoot's "If You Could Read My Mind," both unabashedly disco songs made after disco had supposedly died, are still played in Gay men's dance clubs, decades after disco has faded from the contemporary music scene.

Disco's Children

The techniques developed in disco became Rave, Circuit, Hip-Hop, and the work-in-progress called the underground dance scene that

22. Cadence that is sung for marching soldiers by their leader.
23. More about the relationship between marching and Circuit dancing performance will be found in Chapter 12.
24. The next chapter is dedicated to African and African American influence on disco, house music, and the Circuit.

nurtures these forms. DJ culture that spawned both Raves and Circuit parties began in Gay clubs in 1970s Manhattan. The Rave community was formed when New York-transplanted Chicago house music (along with Detroit techno house) and MDMA traveled overseas to England and the island of Ibiza in the late 1980s. The scene jelled there and quickly spread to New York, San Francisco, and eventually every major city in the United States and Canada (Silcott 17–46).

Raves and Circuit parties became popular at just about the same time in the late 1980s and throughout the '90s. Both Raves and Circuit parties open the dance floor up to single dancers. Groups of friends can dance with each other for the duration of an event and never couple up if they so choose. In the fluid setting of the Circuit and the Rave scene, people have the option to go through several kinds of social interaction while on the dance floor. They may dance by themselves, dance with some friends, dance with new acquaintances, dance with a partner, or present themselves to everybody and dance on a raised platform or box.

The average age of Ravers is younger than that of Circuiteers (twenty-two compared to thirty-three years). Like Circuiteers, Ravers tend to see themselves as a tribe. DJs are stars, perhaps even more so than in the Circuit. Music can go from very slow grooves in the "chill room" (a lounge with its own DJ where the volume and room temperature tend to be lower) to fast-paced music as high as 170 bpm on the dance floor. Raves tend to have faster dance beats on average than the Circuit (perhaps attributable to the exuberance of a younger crowd). This in turn necessitates the presence of chill rooms, rarely found at Circuit parties, to give exhausted and overheated dancers a place to rest and recuperate.

Men at Raves learn quickly not to treat women the same way as they would in the alcohol-based dance culture of the typical club scene. The unwritten code that insists upon one-on-one dancing between a man and a woman is null and void. Men can learn to peacefully bond with *people* through the performance of Rave ecstatic dance.

Masculinity in Raves is understood differently than the Circuit. A truce exists in the battle between the sexes that extends to relations among men, as expressed in the PLUR acronym: Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect. Rave sensuality is much less sexually explicit than Circuit sensuality, which could be represented by PLUS: Peace, Love, Unity, and *Sex*. This is not to say that a man cannot be sexy at a Rave, but it is a radically different kind of sexiness from the heteronormative bar scene for Straight men. "Beer muscles" at a Rave will draw ridicule rather than respect. There is also less emphasis on muscle-as-beautiful and physical perfection. Bob Ganem, a DJ who made the switch from the Rave scene to the Circuit scene, says that body fascism is not a

problem in the Rave scene because "Raves began as places where misfits could go and be accepted. There is a rejection of surface values" (personal communication, October 2002). Raver clothing is looser and shirts do not come off as a matter of course. In general, men in Raves tend to use their bodies to show off how well they can dance, while men in Circuit parties use dance to show off how good their bodies look.

Hard-core Ravers that come to the Circuit are recognizable immediately by the way they dance, which has much more bounce in the step. They often incorporate interweaving hand movements, which may be due to the fondness Ravers have for glowsticks. Light toys make patterns in the air when hand movements weave in and around, an added bonus for the observer (and the dancer) who is high on drugs that enhance light and color, such as MDMA.[25] Some of the musical styles found in Raves (gabba, jungle, drum-and-base, and techno, for example) are alien to the Circuit, which tends to privilege trance, deep house, electro-house, high-NRG, diva house, gospel house, progressive, and tribal. It is often the case that LGBTQ folk attend Raves in their youth because there is no pressure to conform to heterosexual norms.

Ultra

I attended Ultra 2007, a two-day electronic music festival in Miami held in March that could be considered the nearest thing in Rave culture to a Circuit weekend.[26] Extravagantly huge and shamelessly commercial, Ultra attracts some 50,000 participants, mostly in their early twenties, with state-of-the-art music and lights, world-famous DJs, several simultaneous dance areas, and a general sense of camaraderie that typifies the nonviolent masculinity that Raves foster. The crowd was Gay-tolerant and exuberant. Some noticeable differences from Circuit events include the following four features:

1. There is a tendency for participants to face the DJ rather than each other as they dance. This tendency can be found in both Rave and underground music culture. I attribute this phenomenon to the truce between the sexes; common ground is expressed through fixing one's focus on the DJ and not directly on the objects of one's desire.

2. The larger performances featured go-go girls onstage with the DJs but no go-go boys. It is obvious in the way that these women were presented that the promoters were catering to Straight men, thus promoting a not-so-PLUR masculinity. However, they need not have bothered.

25. Ravers will sometimes do solo glowstick performances for each other in which one raver will be still, while another weaves light patterns near the unmoving observer's eyes. I was told that this was called "glowsticking."

26. Burning Man in Nevada and the Detroit Electronic Music Festival are other such events.

I do not think that many people really cared. For the most part, the go-go girls were not terribly enthused about what they were doing because neither was anyone else.

3. There was the unfortunate presence of local celebrities who would talk during the performances of superstar DJs, saying things like, "DJ So-and-So is the SHIT, Miami! MAKE SOME FUCKING NOISE!" ad nauseum, sometimes for the entire set. There was some poetic justice when, during one such rant, the offensive celebrity was pelted with glowsticks by angry Ravers, accompanied by shouts of "SHUT UP!"

4. The men in the crowd were not quite metrosexual, but they were on their way. They were much more likely to use obscenities and exhibit macho posturing than Circuit boys. The influence of Gay dance culture was nevertheless apparent in the way that many of these men would display their shirtless torsos, even when the temperature had dropped after sundown. This appeared to be as much a display for the attention of other men as it was for women. In addition to that, there was no violence, and I heard no smart remarks made about Gays.

The cardinal rules of underground dance culture worldwide have been individualized to the point where the only requirements are to move to the beat and not interfere with other dancers as they do their thing. At its roots, it is an ethos of democracy and inclusion. Both Rave and Circuit communities adhere to that ethos, which ruled supreme during Ultra 2007.

Although a stage had been set up for Hip-Hop artists and DJs, there was a noticeable absence of deep house DJs at Ultra. An event that catered to deep house DJs and fans sponsored by Bembe and Ocha Records ("bembe" can refer to a Lukumi-Santeria ritual, and "Ocha" is the Cuban form of *Orishá* or *Orixá*) was going on at the same time as Ultra on that Saturday to make up for the deficiency.

Hip-Hop and Ballroom

The Hip-Hop scene is not completely separated from the Rave and Circuit scenes. One can see young Circuiteers and Ravers accessorizing "bad boy" Hip-Hop fashions. The privileging of violence in the gangsta movement within Hip-Hop, however, keeps interaction between the scenes at a minimum. Both the Rave and the Circuit scene are tolerant of same-sex sexual orientation, while Hip-Hop tends to be tolerant of homophobia and misogyny. Aforementioned choreographer Chris Davis has this to say about Hip-Hop and the Circuit:

> The younger generation of Gays are definitely influenced by some of the "lite" Hip-Hop artists such as Missy Elliott, Kanye West and, to

> some extent, Common. These are Hip-Hop artists that don't Gay bash and that some Gay DJs such as Randy Bettis play in the clubs. When you see boys in the clubs with their shirts off and wearing tight ski caps and sunglasses, this isn't just a skater boy look. It's a look that is seen in major Hip-Hop videos and is supposed to come across as very masculine amongst other men, even in a Gay male environment. (personal communication, July 2007)

In terms of attitude and language, the Circuit has been influenced much more by Ballroom culture than Hip-Hop. Simplified body movements taken from the extravagant gestures used in voguing and runway have entered into the Circuit's kinesthetic vocabulary. For example, one may see the adroit use of the face and the gaze in creative ways that allow the dancer to perform as observer, then instantly become the object of observation by a sharp turn of the head at just the right moment. Nevertheless, movements and poses taken from the Ballroom scene are rarely as dramatic (or take up as much room) in the Circuit party as they are at the Ball.

How to Dance "Gay"

Most of the trends that make the Gay men's dance movement distinctive began almost immediately after liberation. In the decade before Stonewall, Gay men's festive culture included an element of hide-and-seek with the law. LGBTQ folk had to be much more circumspect when they danced together than Straight folk. Some Gay men's clubs insisted that there be at least one woman dancing with every two men. Since the pre-Stonewall dance scene was clandestine, we have no way of accurately describing what was going on, as it could have been vastly different in private homes and clubs with varying degrees of seclusion away from police scrutiny. We do know, however, that the public bar scene was vulnerable to police intrusion at a moment's notice. Loughery describes the situation of uncertainty and anxiety that came with an evening of carefree frivolity:

> By the 1960s, gay men and lesbians were chafing at the strict rules enforced within the bar (even when the police weren't around) by the owners nervous about their licenses. If a woman was on the floor to make it seem as if the men nearby were dancing with her; if the men were in a line and never facing one another; if the monitor on the ladder with the flashlight was satisfied that no one was too close; if the red light behind the bar wasn't flashing to indicate the sudden approach of the police—then what ensued might be called "dancing together." (277)

After Stonewall, Gay men explored a range of movements in the privacy of their own clubs without police harassment. Disco music arose in the early 1970s with a relentlessly driving beat that would allow men from different ethnic backgrounds and dance skills to move together in unison. The basic pattern of two people dancing together would be the norm, but dance moves would resist strict codification and remain relatively informal in the manner of the 1960s. Newton describes the effect of disco on the dance scene in Fire Island:

> Just when police harassment had ended and men could dance with men and women with women, disco almost dissolved the couple as the dancing unit. The dancing became much more overtly sexual and more group oriented, an indoor representation of the group sex that was happening in the [Meat] Rack. Drug use, which had begun in the gay community, as elsewhere, in the 1960s, seemed especially suited to the flashing lights and general erotic sweatiness of the disco. The traditional drug of choice in Cherry Grove—alcohol—developed rivals favored by the younger crowd, different colored pills called uppers and downers, marijuana, acid, and eventually cocaine. (Cherry Grove 244)

The patterns of dance-floor behavior set in the days of disco are kept alive in Straight clubs, LGBTQ dance clubs, and Circuit parties. Gay men at Circuit parties follow many of the same rules as everyone else in the house music club scene, except for a tendency to enhance intimate body contact with multiple partners, a fondness for dancing shirtless, and a tendency *not* to face the DJ. Sometimes groups of men dance together in conga-like lines composed of bodies facing the same direction but pressed against each other in what could be described as a communal body-rub (what I've heard some people call a "caterpillar"). They may also form a group huddle with their arms around each other. The most popular dance step is the universal side-to-side shuffle seen on dance floors around the world, which can be done solo or with a partner (or two). In the Circuit, slow songs have disappeared in favor of a strict adherence to music played between 125–135 beats per minute.

Although there are no distinct dances in the Circuit, there are definable characteristics in the ways that Circuiteers tend to dance. The best dancers in the Circuit (and in house cultures) internalize the 32–count of house music. They do not simply move to the beat of a song, but will physically signal its pulse as well. Circuit boys and girls will usually "strike" (make a bold assertive gesture) on the first beat of a 32, 64, or 128–count, depending on how the song builds up its momentum.

The most distinctive feature in Gay men's dance, especially the Circuit, is sensual couples-dancing. It is a dance with raw rhythmic

sensuality, often expressed in crotch-to-crotch or butt-to-groin grinding and thrusting. It is not unusual for a couple dancing sensually together to become a threesome, foursome, or any number from five to ten men in the aforementioned caterpillar or conga line. At this point, adherence to rhythm as a cohesive mass tends to go out the window. Many men will scrupulously avoid such antics because of appearance. Raw sensuality that is undisciplined by adherence to rhythm implies lack of control.

Rhythmic sensuality is perhaps the clearest communal expression of Gay liberation possible to the Gay male body, and it dates back to the time when Gay men began forming their own clubs.[27] "Bruising" was a dance of this sensual genre (perhaps the only one ever given a name on record) that appeared briefly in Manhattan Gay clubs in the mid-1970s. Mel Cheren, its inventor, calls it "a particularly muscular sort of dancing that featured about as much bumping and grinding as you could get outside of the bedroom, or for that matter, the boxing ring" (166). Aggressive body slamming to the beat found in bruising can still be found in Gay men's clubs and Circuit parties. Care is usually taken, however, to not let the dance get *too* sexual or too aggressive, unless the dancers mean to be outrageous and funny.

Sensual dancing between Gay men goes right up to the border of what might be considered a sex act, and occasionally people cross the line. It is not unusual during Circuit parties to see men dancing together with their hands in each other's pants. Although it is by no means a dance maneuver practiced by the majority of participants at the same time, hands-down-the-pants is probably something that most Circuit boys have done at one time or another. Less frequent is the actual performance of sex acts on the dance floor. Fear of being perceived as "messy" (out of control) usually inspires men to stay off their knees and keep their pants up.

27. No doubt, sensual dancing existed before Stonewall. There is little to nothing, however, describing how it was done.

Commentary: Timothy Miracle

Cincinnati
January 2007

I own a dance studio with my husband, Jeff Pitzer. We have both been attending Circuit events together for years. I studied formally at Wright State University. I am certified with the Dance Masters of America to teach.

In formal dance (that being of discipline and technique, not in academia), there are no licensing procedures. Anyone may open a dance studio offering classes as an education. You may or may not have acquired a BFA in dance. Having a BFA in dance, while it may be impressive, has little to absolutely nothing to do with the talent that you have toward the art form. Some of the most gifted artists get right into the field and begin performing and then eventually teaching with no college education at all. If you are fortunate to find a gifted teacher at an early age, then college is almost totally unnecessary to begin your career. The value that the dance society validates us with is the acknowledgement and praise that we as artists are given when we make great achievements that are recognized by our peers and, most importantly, the audiences we perform for. After all, without an audience we are nothing. And an audience that doesn't enjoy or celebrate your work will not promote you and will eventually cease to attend.

The history of popular dance in America goes from choreography for the entire group to minimal choreography for the couple, and then to no choreography at all. The jig and some of the African American styles of dance are earlier forms of dance that move away from set choreography and emphasize improvisation. Even then, those forms require stylized movements, unlike Circuit dancing, which is more freestyle and, truthfully, less sophisticated. To dance a jig or to tap dance takes practice. Just about anyone can walk on the dance floor of a Circuit party and look just like everyone else without a day of training.

I recognize that improvisation is not lack of discipline. Modern dance does allow for more improvisation than older forms. The difference between the average Circuit dancers and professional dancers is professional dancers have polish that comes from highly disciplined training. Their movements are controlled and precise, not haphazard and all over the place.

This is not to say that there are no distinct dance moves that people use in the Circuit. From my perspective, however, there is not much discipline in their movements or the way they do them. You have to

remember; for me as a professional, dance is a discipline that requires training. It is not unregulated self-expression. When I am at a Circuit party, that's a different story.

When it comes to time signatures and accents, a dancer does not count the same way as a musician counts. A dancer is concerned about beats per measure, beats per minute, and pulse, not quarter notes, half notes, etc. When the music is tailored to pulses that a dancer can strike on the spot in the freestyle arena of the Circuit, then that music is Circuit music.

Dance is subjective. Some consider only technical ballet to be dance. Others consider any type of movement to music (or not) to be dance. I believe that people are dancing in Circuit parties, but I am not sure if I would consider the side-to-side rocking motion done by individuals or groups on a dance floor to be dance as I teach it. I cannot critique "Circuit dance" as there is nothing to base the critique on. There are few rules or skills to follow (other than striking on the pulse) therefore there is nothing to judge a Circuit dancer by. It is impossible to pick out individuals on a dance floor and critique them. Looking out over the crowd is like looking at a blank wall.

I once got up in front of everybody at a Circuit party and began to dance like a professional dancer. People stopped what they were doing and stared at me because I really stood out. Some of them asked me if I was a stripper. I won't do it any more. That's not why I'm there. I'd rather feel like one of the crowd. Besides, professional dancing is my job, and I wouldn't want another professional dancer who might be watching to critique me when I'm just out to have a good time.

Chapter 11

Axé

Axé pra você (axé to you).

—Bahian greeting

In order to understand spirituality-in-motion on the Circuit dance floor, it is not enough to look at the history of dance by itself. Rhythm and music are the sources of energy that fuel the performance of dance in the Circuit and, like dance, have African roots. Music is also the primary means for participants and performers to transmit Africanized spirituality into Circuit spirituality.[1]

The Brazilian African Yoruba term *axé* refers to spiritual power and authority. In *Meu Tempo É Agora* (My Time Is Now[2]) axé is defined as "power to accomplish by means of supernatural force" (poder de realização atravéz de força sobrenatural).[3] Robert Farris Thompson says that axé is "spiritual command, the power-to-make-things-happen, God's own enabling light rendered accessible to men and women" (5). Axé makes the world go round. It is in all things at all times.

But axé does not exist in all things at the same level of intensity. Jim Wafer describes axé as mobile: "*Axé* moves around," he says, "A thing that 'has' *axé* at one moment may lose it in the next. From this

1. Usually these Circuiteers and performers are African Americans who grew up attending Spirit-filled churches, or are Latin Americans with connections to Africanized Latin music, dance, and possibly New World African religious communities. Some European Americans bring it as well; there are many White DJs who pick up on the Africanized spiritual vibe and work it into their sets and remixes.
2. *Meu Tempo É Agora* was written by Mother Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos (*iyalorixá* Mãe Stella de Oxossi of the House of Axé Opô Afonjá). Mãe Stella is one of the most respected religious authorities in the Candomblé community.
3. Mother Stella would also point out that a proper Candomblé ritual should not be confused with a folkloristic show that dramatizes Candomblé or *carnaval* songs that tap into Candomblé rhythms, music, and dance. Candomblé is serious business with a festive flair.

perspective *axé* has a lot in common with fashion … it is not entirely predictable" (Wafer 19). Lorenzo de Almeida describes its use in common *bahiano*[4] speech: "Axé is peace, good energy. In Bahia, axé can be used in a greeting, '*Axé pra você*' ('Axé to you') or describing something as powerful, as in *muito axé*" (much axé) (interview, January 2008). If one wants to effect change in this world, there may not be enough axé to make things happen. There must first be a sufficient amount on hand. In classical Yoruba Orixá religion, axé is generated through rituals that incorporate plants, utilize the lifeblood of animals through sacrifice, and include rhythm, music, and dance.

According to *babalorixá*[5] scholar Júlio Braga, "There is nothing more divine than dance, than music."[6] Rhythm, music, and dance generate currents of axé among participants. Such an obvious manifestation of axé is not as readily apparent in Orixá rituals of sacrifice and purification that do not incorporate dance. Techniques using rhythm and music are the principal strategies by which the gods are manifested in the dancing body-minds of mediums. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of merging with the beat as sacred expression, experience, authority, and a source of power.

There is an understanding of *Spirit* in Black charismatic or Spirit-filled church that parallels axé. In Africanized Christianity, spiritual power and authority are personified in the dynamic presence of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who is seen as the living supernatural agent made manifest-in-motion when a congregant "catches the Spirit," is resplendently "Spirit-filled," or is rendered unconscious and "slain in the Spirit." The Spirit is in all things at all times but is made manifest more strongly in some people than in others, and during certain moments more so than others. The ritualized accumulation of power in classical African religions that comes with accessing the life force of plants and the lifeblood of sacrificed animals, however, is not recognized by most African American Charismatic Christians as appropriate praxis, and neither is the multiplicity of legitimate spirits. Africanized rhythm, music, and dance are forms of spiritual expression in the divine performance repertoire that get transmitted cross-culturally from classical African religions to Africa in the New World, and from New World Africa to the Circuit.

Like axé and the Spirit, Circuit fierceness is fluid, sometimes radiantly intense, other times absent, but always potentially present and

4. Bahian, as in people and dialect from Bahia in Brazil
5. *Babalorixá* or *pai-de-santo* refer to the priest-father in charge of a Candomblé House.
6. "Porque nada é mais divino do que a dança, do que a música" (interview, March 1996).

readily transmittable. The vital importance of the cherished minority of African American Circuit participants and performers (including African American songstresses and quasi-drag performance artists) in the production of Circuit spirituality should not be underestimated.[7] It is their fierceness, their own transformation and expression of axé/Spirit within the communal transcendence of the Circuit that gives the Circuit its distinct spiritual flavor, its own fierce solidarity.

In *Infectious Rhythm*, Barbara Browning describes adroit syncopation as an important dynamic of axé/Spirit:

> African diasporic possessional music is syncopated—that is, it produces a regular irregularity in the rhythm—and that rhythm is further "broken" in order to facilitate the entrance of the divinities. This means, in part, the sharp slap of a stick or the palm of the hand where a beat is unanticipated. (103)

Syncopation is a key feature of music-and-dance spirituality in classical African religion and Africanized charismatic Christianity, a feature that is remixed into various genres of underground dance music and energizes the body-minds of participants in the spiritual performance of masculinity found in the Circuit. The "regular irregularity" of African and African diasporic music is repeated deregulation of the beat that destabilizes the participant and breaks down barriers between participants. It is the un-disciplining of the pulse in order to re-discipline it anew through repetition. The irregularity is regularized, intensified, and absorbed, undermining the day-to-day rhythms of participants' body-minds so that communal forms of transcendence can impose their own patterns on individuals, who are in turn given the freedom to develop new kinesthetic disciplines.

In a Candomblé festa, a Pentecostal Holiness church, or a Circuit party, syncopation is one reliable source for the highly prized innovation, deregulation, and subversion of static disciplines that separate one individual from another. Syncopation fosters axé/Spirit/fierceness, which in turn sets the stage for the community to create, re-create, and reinforce its own regulations of solidarity.

It is not unusual to hear Circuit boys, especially those of African descent, to exclaim "Work!" when they see people expressing themselves

7. Not all African Americans come from such a background. As Chris Davis told me, "Black people raised in a conservative Catholic environment do not have the same basis of freedom as someone raised in more evangelical Protestant environs. I do believe that conservative Catholic African Americans can observe the behavior of more liberated brethren and sistren and take that on, the same way that a White person can observe the emotion involved with 'work' and take it onto their persona" (personal communication, July 2007).

with unusual vigor. Kai Fikentscher, author of *"You'd Better Work!" Underground Dance Music in New York City*, defines "work" as it is used in the club scene:

> Dancing (also deejaying) is frequently referred to as "Working (it) out," as "Work it!" or as "You better work!"—the corresponding encouragement or compliment to a particular dancer's (or DJ's) performance. (64)

Within the rich verbal heritage of African Americans and other cultures in New World Africa, there is more to "work" than just encouragement. In the Deep South, "working a root" refers to casting a Hoodoo spell. *Trabajo* and *trabalho* ("work" in Spanish and Portuguese, respectively), refer to ritual magic in New World African religious communities such as Cuban Lukumi-Santería and Brazilian Candomblé. In one sense, the exclamation "Work!" or "Work that body!" on the dance floor is evocative of casting a spell, or simply the recognition that a spell is being successfully cast. The intensity of a well-done performance (to "work" as in "she worked the crowd") by a dancer or DJ can be entrancing, magical, enchanting. When people work their bodies, they summon forth their own intensity and show the world how good they look in motion. To work a dance floor is to conjure something from within oneself and enchant those who watch. And it is through work that axé/Spirit becomes fierceness.

Multiple Africas

Circuit music can be traced to three major multicultural sources: African American R&B/disco music; African and African-Latin music and rhythms from Cuba,[8] Puerto Rico, Haiti, Jamaica, Brazil, and West/Central Africa; and the Africanized Christian music of Black gospel. All three of these sources have profoundly spiritual roots that tend to surface during the ecstasy of dance, even when the music takes a decidedly secular turn.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, disco music is designed to help people from different cultures and backgrounds dance together. The songs are tailored to seamlessly blend one into another, allowing dancers to immerse themselves in a continuous rhythm for hours. I can remember the reactions of older White people around me when they heard it: they thought disco was just a bit *too* catchy and complained that it was subversively hypnotic. They also found it too Black for their tastes. As one of my disgruntled White elders once put it years ago

8. Cuban-born DJ César Murillo (Toronto) said he wants to bring many more Cuban rhythms to the Gay male dance scene, but he must do so gradually because non-Latin/non-African Canadians were not yet ready to hear them all at once (personal communication, April 2008).

when he heard disco music played during a wedding reception, "Are we in Africa?"

Some scholars say that the first disco song was "Soul Makossa" by Manu Dibango of Cameroon (1972).[9] The success of "Soul Makossa" inspired a flood of R&B songs by Black artists with the same format of a strong, non-stop, central beat that can easily be matched up with other songs of the same genre (a distinctive trait of military marches, which can be played nonstop, one after another) and interwoven with catchy polyrhythms and melody. Groundbreaking disco songs include "Rock Your Baby" (George McCrae), "Love Train" (O'Jays), "Who's That Lady" (Isley Brothers), "The Sound of Philadelphia" (MFSB), "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" (Sylvester, an openly Gay male disco singer who performed in drag), and the first disco remix: "Never Can Say Goodbye" (Gloria Gaynor), all by African American artists.

Disco music could be separated roughly into two different styles: R&B and European. The difference lay in two areas: European disco emphasizes the marching beat as its main percussive component. Since many of the first European disco songs were produced in Germany, the Teutonic fondness for the sound of military marches found both in parades and in *Fasching* drinking songs is quite apparent, but with a decidedly effeminate flair.[10] R&B disco music in the United States would often downplay the marching beat in favor of more elaborate syncopation wedded with gospel-inspired vocals and elements of fusion jazz. European disco, on the other hand, favored lush orchestration. The lyrics of European disco tended to be formulaic (highly repetitive lyrics about dancing, sex, and romance), while R&B disco covered a broader range of topics. As to be expected, there were more than a few songs that tapped into both styles.[11]

Almost as fast as they had opened in the mid-1970s, Straight discotheques across the nation began closing at the end of the 1970s, while Gay dance clubs increased in number. When European disco fell out of favor with the general population (in part due to the flood of formulaic songs in which a monotonous beat and simplistic lyrics became oppressingly mindless), R&B was still strong, producing dance music that was

9. "Theme from *Shaft*" by Isaac Hayes is another candidate for first disco song. With its initial release as an extended version song in 1971, it anticipated disco 12" single remixes. Also, the horn section and lush strings mark it as an early disco prototype.

10. I am not sure I have the language to describe what I mean by the effeminate sound of European disco. Suffice it to say that, instead of hard, aggressive rock-'n'-roll riffs, there were flowing orchestral melodies. The string section replaced the electric guitar.

11. Early R&B disco used a lot of orchestral music, especially in what was labeled the Philadelphia sound.

essentially disco but no longer labeled as such. African American musicians such as Inner City; Earth, Wind, and Fire; Patrice Rushen; Chaka Khan; and Michael Jackson (and European groups such as Kraftwerk and New Order) continued producing dance hits with a recognizable disco format *without* calling them disco. These songs were the direct precursors of house music, which today includes "disco house" as its own genre.

As mentioned earlier, disco was rooted in Black, Latino, Western European, and Manhattan Gay musical/dance sensibilities. Most of the songs that DJs put into continuous play at these venues were African American soul and soul-influenced disco music. The DJ culture that fostered disco music started in Gay male dance venues. Two of the most important figures in early DJ culture were Larry Levine and Frankie Knuckles, both of them Black Gay men. Many DJs today, both Straight and Gay, trace their trade back to the genius of these two legendary figures.

Circuit music is predominantly remixed house music with some Top 40, deep house, and techno on the side. But *tribal* is one musical genre that has flourished in the Circuit more so than in any other community. Pioneered and invigorated in remixes by DJs such as Tony Moran, Victor Calderone, Ralphi Rosario, Abel, and Paulo, the tribal sound is heavily percussive, usually with a techno edge and few vocals, inspiring those who do not care for it to label it "pots and pans." In terms of music, a good tribal house track is espresso for people who can dance. It often loops strong African Cuban, African Brazilian, and West African percussion riffs with bursts of synthesizer keyboard notes (called "synth stabs").

Some tribal songs incorporate classical African religious music. "Chango [Inle-Gue]" is a popular Circuit tune that includes a praise-song, appropriately enough, to Xangô, the masculine Yoruba god of thunder, drums, and dance. Claude Monnet marries tribal with Haitian Kreol in "Voodoo Bounce," a song that invokes Dambala, the Vodoun *Lwa* (god) of the Serpent and Rainbow. Others suggest Africanized spirituality, such as Victor Calderone's remix of Angelique's "Holy Water."

Another genre of dance music that has strong African/African American influences is the aforementioned deep house, which incorporates gospel, jazz, Cuban/Brazilian beats, and African traditional music in a manner that is more melodic than what one might find in a tribal house track. Favored by older participants and a fiercely loyal cadre of African American Circuiteers, deep house is the most romantic musical genre of the Circuit and the underground dance scene. It is also considered the most spiritual and uplifting. New World Africa is well represented; one outstanding example is Haitian musician Jephte

Guillaume, who incorporates the rhythms of Vodoun into deep house classics such as "Ibo Lele."

During the March 2008 Winter Music Conference in SOBE/Miami, I went to the Jellybean Soul party at the Hotel Victor sponsored by John "Jellybean" Benitez. This event was a deep house happening and featured the best dancer-participants in any event I have attended for several years. People brought in two conga drums, wooden clap-sticks, and a tambourine to keep time with the music.

As if to confirm my notions of *axé*, the music at the Jellybean Soul party included gospel-inspired, jazz-inspired, and Greater African-inspired electronic dance music. There were live performances by the soul icon Ambrosia as well as the Yoruba-British diva Wunmi. At the height of the party, a Santeria-Lukumi devotee, dressed completely in white and wearing the beads appropriate to his deities, came in and joined the drummers. Nobody batted an eye. A gospel choir could have easily fit into the mix that night as well. In fact, this happened, sort of: on the spur of the moment, three gospel-trained men came together and sang three-part harmony for Ambrosia as she sang her deep house classic, "That's How Much I Love You."

Gospel and jazz influences in Circuit music are often in the vocal tracks found in what DJ Chuck Q of Columbus calls "screaming diva" or "Black diva"[12] music (interview, January 2002). Devotion to Black divas includes mainstream superstars (Janet Jackson, Whitney Houston, Mary J. Blige, Debra Cox) and Circuit superstars (Martha Wash, Pepper MaShay, Ultra Naté, and Inaya Day, to name a few).

The importance of Black women in Circuit music brings up the question of why, exactly, Gay men are so attracted to Black divas. Perhaps it is because these women often sing about the men in their lives. Many songs have lyrics that reflect themes to which Gay men can easily relate in their own romantic relationships. A woman who is raised singing Black gospel can bring fierce intensity to a song, which is appealing to Circuit boys because it resonates with the intensity of the Circuit experience. It is not unusual to see Circuiteers singing along, especially with songs that affirm one's identity in the face of romantic adversity, such as "It's Not Right But It's Okay" by Whitney Houston and "U Ain't That Good" by Sheila Brody.

12. Not all Circuit divas and performance artists are Black (case in point: Kristine W [Weitz], Sylvia Tosun, Shokra, and Flava). The vast majority, however, are African American. In contrast to the divas, most DJs who have played the Circuit are White. Only a few are Black, such as Sharon White, Frankie Knuckles, Chad Jack, Power Infiniti, and Chuck Q (Quarles). Besides race, several DJs are ethnically Latin/Hispanic, such as Tony Moran, Abel (Aguilera), Ralphi Rosario, DJ Paulo (Gois), Joe Bermudez, DJ Pride (Yvette Fernandez), Hector Fonseca, Oscar G (Gaetan), Eddie Baez, Ana Paula, Roland Belmares, and César Murillo.

Kevin Green

James Kriegsmann

Martha Wash *Inaya Day*

For years, Gay men and gospel-belting, soul-shaking divas have supported each other. If one goes to any Gay male nightclub, Circuit party, or ocean cruise, one will usually hear at least one upbeat spiritual anthem sung by a powerful African American woman with one of the following topics:

- Love will save the world
- Jesus will save the world
- My God will save the world
- My man rocks my world
- My man is a self-centered, two-faced whore and I'm dumping his sketchy ass[13]

The love that these fierce women receive from the Circuit community often eclipses anything they might get from the Straight world. A perfect example is Martha Wash, a beloved Circuit diva who started out in the club scene as one of two backup singers for Sylvester. While Martha Wash and Izora Rhodes were with Sylvester (who was quite

13. In a scandalous example of Circuit verbal performance, Erikk Martin invokes violence to describe how Black women are fierce: "Have you ever seen a Black woman beat her children in public? I mean, those women let you know that you do not cross them. That's why screaming diva music is so fierce. It's fierce when a Black woman sings how her man better treat her right" (interview, July 2004).

Karl Giant

Ultra Naté

the diva himself) before he died of AIDS, they were known as Two Tons of Fun. They later formed a duo called the Weathergirls. Their biggest hit was "It's Raining Men," a Gay male club classic.

Wash's powerful voice brought her some mainstream success, but then took a vicious turn. Wash was a vocalist for two major dance music groups, C&C Music Factory and Black Box. Both groups replaced her image in music videos with that of slimmer Black women because she was deemed too large to be marketable (Bogdanov 731).

I have seen Martha Wash perform live at Circuit parties (she also performs at other Gay functions such as Pride parades). The adoration she receives from the sea of shirtless Circuiteers is matched by the energy she puts into her performance. I would imagine that when she performs in Straight venues, she rarely gets the kind of response that the Circuit community gives her.

Gospel-inspired Circuit music (sometimes called "churchy," or what born-again Christian DJ Jeremy James calls "cha-cha praise") can be seen as fulfilling a threefold function. The first is to uplift the crowd spiritually, increase its energy, and focus it on something more than

simply intoxication and sex. The second reason for the popularity of the gospel Circuit sound is a bit more devilish. Christ is invoked precisely because it is transgressive to do so. Circuit parties clash with the sensibilities of Christians who would condemn Gays. Truthfully, the results of a gospel song played in the middle of a Circuit party full of intoxicated, horny men can indeed be hilarious, bringing smiles and laughter across the dance floor. Not once, however, have I heard gospel music played in order to condemn Christians or mock God. Those who are Christian Circuit boys (and there are many) usually respond very well to hearing songs with divas praising Jesus. The third reason is to create a melding of religious devotion and romance. Donna Allen's dance classic "He Is The Joy" can be heard in two ways: as a song praising Jesus (who is never directly named) and as a love song to her man.

Such double entendre can be found in the lyrics of Inaya Day's song, "Save Me." "It's sort of a prayer I wrote when I was going through a down period," she said (personal communication, April 2008):

From this life so cruel
From this drowning pool
I need a helping hand
Someone to understand
From this trying time
From losing my mind
Don't know what to do
I need someone to
Save me, save me
Save me from hurt and please save me from harm
Save me from evil when wrapped in your arms
Save me from people that mean me no good
Make my way clear when I'm misunderstood
Save me

Churchy divas and African American performance artists such as Inaya Day, Ultra Naté, Power Infiniti, Kitty Meow, and Kevin Aviance reinterpret axé/Spirit into fierceness, the quintessential power source, intangible authority, and much desired social commodity that flows through Circuit performance on and off the dance floor. For many of these artists, fierceness has strong spiritual roots. I asked Circuit diva and deep house DJ Ultra Naté if what she did was spiritual. "I hope so," she said, "or I'm wasting my time" (personal communication, May 2008).

When asked about disco evangelism and the role of Black Church for Circuit divas, Inaya Day had this to say:

> Disco evangelism! I love that phrase. I guess that's what many of us bring to the clubs. I've come from, and am in, church, so church is in me. It's where I got my chops and the spiritual inspiration behind the technical ability. We call that spiritual inspiration "The Anointing." It's a special blessing that God gives those who are commissioned by Him to do a certain thing. Whenever I open my mouth to sing, I invoke that spirit. Without it, for me, all else is futile. I would feel nothing and the audience would feel nothing. Vocal acrobatics are wonderful—I make my attempts at them myself. But what are those tricks if the music has no depth? When someone asks where I got my voice, I tell them, "God." If He doesn't see fit to sing through me, I shan't sing at all. When I ask people, "Do you feel me?" I want that answer to be "Yes" because if they feel me through song, they feel the inexplicable presence of God! And for me, that's what it's all for. (personal communication, April 2008)

But the roots of some singers in homophobic Christianity can create problems for them with the Circuit community. In 2006, Kim English, a favorite African American Circuit songstress, said she did not believe that homosexuality was a lifestyle that God agrees with (Weems, "Gospel" 52). This statement raised questions within the Circuit community as to whether English should be hired to perform at Circuit events.

Most gospel-based divas are either quiet about their beliefs concerning homosexuality or openly support the Gay community. The grand disco diva, Donna Summer, is outspoken about the love she feels for Gay people, as are Inaya Day and Ultra Naté. Pepper MaShay[14] has even sung a duet with renowned Gay porn star Colton Ford (Stevie Wonder's "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," released in 2004). Many of these women raise money for AIDS-related causes.

14. MaShay also supported the Gay community after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, when fundamentalist Christian leaders Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson said that Gay people, among others, were responsible for the attacks.

Commentary: Chris Davis

New York City
May 2007

My self-description: besides the fact that I'm a diva?

I'm the manager for two big room/Circuit DJs and have choreographed big dance events for even bigger divas. I have a communications degree with an emphasis in public relations and advertising. I've traveled the world and been seen in seven Broadway shows and three motion pictures.

One of the advantages that I have as a Black man in the mainstream community is my ability to attend Black, Hispanic and White clubs. In years past, I've been exposed to the variety of ways the Gay community expresses itself. Unfortunately, you as a White man don't always have that luxury since you are a minority in ethnic clubs. If you were to ask too many questions, people would wonder if you were some sort of federal agent or just plain weird.

Why do Circuit boys relate to Black screaming divas? I believe that it's because big Black women are marginalized by mainstream society. Yet the divas sing about being strong through the pain. Gay men can relate to this. It's "Somewhere over the Rainbow" belted out by Patti LaBelle. As opposed to a sweet ballad of yearning, Patti turns it into a "balls to the wall" song of defiance. It's like listening to a record by Sweet Pussy Pauline where she is getting the shit fucked out of her and urging the man to give it to her and when he's done she defiantly screams "NEXT!!!!" Strength in the face of adversity is always entrancing.

About the phrase "work it on out": This is based on the call-and-response common to Protestant Black churches. "Work it" in a club is the equivalent of saying, "Preach it, preacher" when the sermon is really good, and the minister is in his groove/rhythm. Same thing happens when Black ministers say a phrase and ask the church to repeat it verbatim.

Axé is highly contagious. That is the beauty and tragedy of energy. It is a transferable entity. "Work" is more than just a word ... it's a feeling of endorphins surging through your veins and freeing your mind to accept the energy that is being passed from one body to the next. This is a chain reaction of axé, a transference of energy.

When a DJ is connected to the energy of the crowd, the DJ puts on a record that is dictated by axé. Now, one could argue that the DJ is making an intellectual choice, not obeying a greater authority. But when the crowd's energy is transferred to the DJ by the heat and vibes in the

room, the DJ is freed from intellectual restrictions and enters a state that is something like divine inspiration. The DJ could be inspired to play a remix of "Old McDonald Had a Farm" and the crowd would respond favorably. Axé is not intellectual choice but emotional choice. The emotional choice the DJ uses in selecting the right song for that right moment enhances the energy of the crowd. The crowd responds with the screams and yells that seem inhuman, yet filled with joy. They may feel the need to close their eyes and become one with the beat and the sound. Some people refer to this as being swept away, but I feel that with axé, you are not swept away by the music. With axé, you become one with the music, matched energy to energy, all on the same plane. Everything is in sync.

Chapter 12

From Marching Soldier to Dancing Queen

Mama and Papa lyin' in bed
Papa rolled over and this is what he said
Give me some
PT [Physical Training]
Give me some
PT
Good for you
Good for me
Mmmm good
Real good

—Marine Corps jody call,[1]
Parris Island, 1983

The most important feature of dance in the Circuit is the awareness of pulse, the energy imparted to the body that comes at specific points in rhythmic repetition. Awareness of the pulse as a means of unifying people from different backgrounds pre-dates the Circuit, disco, and the United States. It goes back thousands of years to the first military marching formations.

Dancing and warfare are intertwined in history. Men's dances across the ages and in different cultures are often martial exercises that imitate combat. Several cultures preserve combat dances as part of their traditional folklore, such as the khattak of the Pushtun (Malik 180), the haka of New Zealand's Maori, Highland fling of Scotland[2] (Ray

1. *Jody call* is a term used in the Marine Corps for a marching chant.
2. I have an LP with Scottish marches called "Highland Pageantry." On the back of the album cover is the following sentence that illustrates the intimate relationship between marching, fighting, and dancing: "Here is military music at its most stirring, played by the Regimental Band and Pipes and Drums of the Black Watch,

Moody Mustafa, www.moodypics.com

Military camp: costumed crew at Halloween's in New Orleans 1999

173), and capoeira in Brazil.[3]

Dance can be defined as rhythmic movement to music,[4] and marching as martial dance. Military marching, in fact, is the first global dance craze, and it spread throughout much of the world as a valuable tool in the production of strong armies.

Not everyone agrees that marching is dance, however. DJ Dadt (pseudonym for "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"), a Gay soldier-DJ-Circuiteer currently serving in the U.S. military who wishes to remain anonymous, says:

> [I] don't agree at all here. Putting people together for the sake of unity and discipline is completely separate from a freestyle expression of happiness. Music and marching may be partners of convenience more than they are expressions of joy or sorrow or other emotions that I would equate to dancing. (personal communication, January 2008)

DJ Dadt has a point, especially when marching in formation during an actual battle. Ever since the use of the phalanx (close formation of soldiers) by the Sumerians over 4000 years ago (Gabriel 25), disciplined communal movement through military drill has been a constant in the history of warfare until the last few hundred years as a battle tactic for adroit application of deadly force, thus may not properly be considered dance. But marching is not limited to the battlefield and battlefield training—it is also used in the military parade. This is a significant difference. When used in parade review, it is ritualized into choreographed and aesthetic movement to music for the purpose of display.

Marching lost its tactical importance in actual combat when modern warfare abandoned the use of regimented formations of soldiers on the battlefield. Nevertheless, it is still invaluable in turning a group of strangers into a unified fighting *corps* (from the French word for "body") and instilling the values of *esprit de corps* (the "spirit of the body" or feeling of solidarity with and loyalty to the group). In

highlighted by the shrill notes of the bagpipes that make you want to get up and march, fight somebody, go charging across a field, do a highland fling, or almost anything other than sit quietly where you are."

3. Capoeira is martial art, sport, and dance. Tradition has it that *capoeiristas* successfully defeated mercenaries who turned against the Brazilian government during the Paraguayan War in the early nineteenth century (Almeida 27–28).
4. The definition of dance is not fixed. Kai Fikentscher gives a more detailed but still vague definition: purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of body movements that are not ordinary motor activities, and that have inherent aesthetic value (59). Dance instructor Timothy Miracle defines it tersely: "Dance is moving to music that inspires the movement. Period!" (personal communication, January 2007)

formal presentation of soldiers in dress uniform, marching is still an important part of military and paramilitary traditions around the world.[5]

In *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-and-Tight*, Carol Burke describes marching as highly disciplined dance:

> Without uniformity, the highly choreographed dance of the military parade would dissolve into chaos. Drill effectively teaches recruits that each must keep every step, every line of the body, even every gaze in sync with the group. Close-order drill is important figuratively—to train individual soldiers under the orchestration of their leaders to configure an army collectively. (27)[6]

Marching together can be profoundly pleasurable. As the jody call quoted earlier states, "Mmmm good/Real good." Those of us who have had much experience marching know the profound and subtle ways it allows the individual to physically merge with the group. An anonymous Straight soldier on his way to Fort Hood, Texas[7] told me, "Marching for the people's eye [in parade review] is like a warrior's secret dance. If you're not a part of the secret dance, you're left out of its mysterious ritual" (interview, January 2008). One is no longer just one person. The magic of military march comes from the experience of uniting with many people into one corporate body. As such, it can be a powerful and pleasurable experience, even when it is physically taxing. Sending soldiers to war is ugly business, so anything that could enliven the spirits of soldiers and ensure their solidarity in the face of war's brutality would be a plus. This is why armies over the ages marched into battle, equipped with weapons and their own drum corps, melodic musical instruments, and fight songs. Pleasures associated with marching, music, and solidarity would be even more pronounced in the non-combat context of parade review.

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5. Marching is no longer strictly the domain of men. For decades, women in the military have also been trained in it, and there are thousands of non-military marching bands that have plenty of women in them. Many of these bands are associated with sports, especially the extremely combative American football. Although the members of marching bands associated with sports are not soldiers, the music that they play includes fight songs to rouse the spirits of their team (or at least get their fans riled up, even to the point of inspiring actual violence). Marching bands utilized in sports can therefore be considered paramilitary.
6. Barbara Ehrenreich describes march as "'dance,' or at least musically-driven motion" (Burke 197).
7. This young man was on his way to training with artillery, and then on to Iraq. After revealing that I was a U.S. Marine writing a book on popular dance, I asked him if he thought marching was a form of dance. He granted me permission to quote him. Later in the conversation, he told me that Gays in the military made him uncomfortable. I never revealed my sexual orientation to him.

I felt the pleasures of marching when I was in Marine Corps boot camp on Parris Island. Marching is not an inborn skill; moving together with any degree of uniformity is not something people can do without a lot of practice. Initially, we recruits were forced to crowd our bodies together into an unorganized, shuffling mess when we moved as a group. Our drill instructors called it "assholes to belly buttons," chest to back and crotch to butt.[8] For all of its potential sexual connotations, however, the assholes-to-belly-buttons maneuver was not homoerotic. It was embarrassing, an undesirable exercise that reflected our *un-sat* (unsatisfactory) communal state, proof of our lack of discipline, and a way to force us to become physically aware of each other. Once my fellow recruits and I learned to move in step shoulder-to-shoulder (there were over sixty of us in our platoon), we felt a palpable sense of pride and solidarity.

The pulse of marching gets tedious if not accompanied with music, and a marching band does not accompany every formation. But bands are not necessary; people produce music with the power of voice. For a platoon of soldiers, it can be one voice, one person who *calls cadence*, the rhythm by which the group will move as one unit. When chanted by a competent leader, calling cadence is a type of singing and an art form in itself. The best callers of cadence in the Marine Corps can quicken the pulse of the march with the rich variety of jody calls available to them.[9]

Pleasures other than music are invoked in some jody calls to quicken the pulse. Often, the lyrics are full of humorous sexual innuendos, including homoerotic ones, such as in the following:

Casey Jones was a son of a bitch
Wrecked his train in a whorehouse ditch
Lined a hundred whores up against the wall
Swore to Hell he'd fuck 'em all
Fucked 98 till his balls turned blue
Then backed off jacked off fucked the other two
Casey Jones went to Hell
Fucked the Devil and his wife as well

8. Crude and suggestive homoerotic language was common in boot camp, but it never once struck me as anything other than purposely-scandalous humor. Here are some examples: when recruits prepare to go naked through the showers as a group, drill instructors might say, "I want to see sixty swinging dicks lined up right now!" Upon seeing a recruit sweating and twitching while in formation because he had to urinate, one drill instructor is reported to have said the recruit was giving him "a hard-on." In both cases, such language was meant to be funny, even when recruits were forbidden to laugh.

9. Burke traces the jody call to African American "Joe de Grinder" work songs (30). Jody calls are call-and-response in the manner of African American praise and worship.

Four little demons up against the wall
Said, "Get him out of Hell 'fore he fucks us all!"[10]

The tendency to inject sex into the march is not limited to the US military. "Quand Madelon" (When Madelon), a marching song popular with French soldiers during World War I, has lyrics full of sexual wordplay about a beautiful barmaid for whom the song is named. For example, Madelon refuses to give her hand in marriage to a love-crazed (fou d'amour) corporal in the last verse. "Why should I take only one man," she retorts, "When I love a whole regiment?"[11]

Compare "Quand Madelon" to the following jody call I learned in boot camp:

Met a pretty gal from a Mississippi town
Marine Corps really brought her down
She said, "You gotta choose 'tween me and the Corps"
Now I don't go to Mississippi no more

There is subtle homoerotic tension between the object of sexual pleasure and the brotherhood of soldiers in both marching songs. Although she wants to fornicate with the regiment rather than fight together with them on the battlefield, Madelon's rejection of marriage and affirmation of allegiance to the combat unit (a humorous parody of what any good soldier should do) parallels the Marine's rejection of a woman's love and the sexual pleasure she can provide in favor of his loyalty to the Corps. Burke says that such lyrics "celebrate the displacement of sexual energy from the female left behind to the enemy waiting on the battlefield" (29). I agree with Burke's analysis, but would add one more function to those lyrics: they reflect the displacement of erotic energy from the female left behind in the civilian world to one's comrades-in-arms waiting in the barracks.[12] One way to deal with this sexual tension is to obliquely recognize it and defuse it with humor.[13]

10. This version is one I learned while growing up by Fort McClellan Army base near Anniston, Alabama. Variations of "Casey Jones" lyrics can be found in *The Erotic Muse* by Ed Cray.
11. "Et pourquoi prendrais-je qu'un seul homme/quand j'aime tout un régiment?" My grandfather, Fred Wroten Weems, of Hazelhurst, Mississippi, brought "Quand Madelon" back with him to the United States after learning it from French troops during World War I. He passed it on to my father, Ray (Ramon) Martinez-Weems, who passed it on to me. My father, my husband, and I sang it together in French to honor my late grandfather on Veteran's Day 2007.
12. Excessive sexual energy appeared to be a very real concern when I was in boot camp. A drill instructor once told me the reason why skivvies (underwear) were shapeless baggy boxers was to keep down sexual tensions that could have been aroused by tight-fitting briefs. There were also rumors that saltpeter (potassium nitrate) was put in our food to prevent us from having erections.
13. DJ Dadt agreed wholeheartedly with this point.

Sex is not the only scandalous topic of marching chants. Several jody calls describe killing others in grotesque ways:

> Throw some candy to the children
> Wait till they gather round
> Then you take your M-16 now
> And mow the little fuckers down (Burke 38)

Sexual and sadistic lyrics are undisciplined expressions of the soldiers' outlaw status as extralegal. Brutality in verse reflects the terrible truths of war in which military personnel find themselves unbound by the morals of civil society. Burke says, "Through such chants, the group asserts itself as the tough 'bad boy,' equally ready to slaughter or to screw. For the trainee, these chants transform the horrifying prospect of combat into a humorous, macabre sport" (29).

When I was in boot camp, we never sang any jody calls with scandalous lyrics while in formation within earshot of officers.[14] Such lyrics could get our drill instructors in trouble with their superiors. Officers feared that visiting civilians would hear them, be offended, and get the entire Corps in trouble if word reached the media. The result is that scandalous lyrics became ours, not for outsiders. As private, intimate, and shared pleasures, these ribald songs bonded us even more to the group as we march-danced together. Like scandalous/hilarious speech in the production of fierce solidarity in the Circuit, lyrics to officially forbidden jody calls break down the barriers between soldiers and foster the military's brand of punitive transcendental solidarity, unity based on shared suffering and outlaw identity.

From Marching to Disco to House Music to the Circuit[15]

The way my fellow recruits and I learned to march in boot camp was to start out on the left foot. This first step is emphasized more than the

14. Drill instructors are enlisted non-commissioned officers (NCOs); they are never officers. While always respectful to officers to their faces, sometimes a drill instructor will call an officer a "zero," referring to the different pay grade under which officers are classified (*O* for officers, *E* for enlisted).

15. This section may resemble a marching lesson; it is not designed to be one. Rather, it is a description of what happens when people march to the sing-song of a leader calling cadence. For those who have undergone the discipline of marching, the description is meant to evoke the experience. The section also describes the sonic tools available to Circuit DJs and is written primarily (but not exclusively) with marchers, DJs, and Circuiteers in mind. For those who are not DJs, never attended a Circuit party, and/or never marched, it is possible to apply what I write to one's own moving, listening, and counting body-mind. It is perhaps even desirable for readers unfamiliar with the subject matter to march a few steps and sing the marching chants (or watch somebody else march and listen to them sing the chants) to observe how they work. I also recommend readers listen to a few songs remixed for the Circuit and count out the beat for themselves. If readers dance as they listen, all the better. I did all of these things as I wrote this chapter.

second, so that when we march, it is "*Left*, right, *left*, right," etc. The emphasis on the left foot creates more energy on that step; that extra energy is the pulse of the march. Double the two-count of the left-foot pulse to 4 (two squared) and there is another pulse on the first count of every four steps: "*One*, two, three, four, *one*, two, three, four," etc. Double it yet again to 8 (two to the third power) and there is an even stronger pulse on the first step: "Your *left*, your left, your left-right-left (done in an 8–count), your *left*, your left, your left-right-left," etc. Most marches with which I am familiar double the iteration twice more to 16 (two to the fourth power) and 32 (two to the fifth) beats, a pattern exemplified in *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord (8 beats)
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored (8+8=16 beats)
He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword (8 beats, starting a second set of 16)
His truth is marching on (16+16=32 beats, modified tune repeats itself in chorus with same number of beats)
Chorus, strong pulse on first beat: Glory, glory, hallelujah
Glory, glory hallelujah
Glory, glory hallelujah
His truth is marching on (32 beats)

Martial music is designed specifically to facilitate choreographed marching. The consistent iterations of 2, 4, 8, 16, and 32 make marching songs predictable and reliable. The pulse of the march acts as the common heartbeat for the unified body-mind of the marchers. The sound of everyone's boots hitting the pavement at the same time not only unifies the participants; it also energizes them much as a strong pulse of blood from the heart energizes the body.

The shared experience of walking makes marching useful in molding armies, especially since armies are comprised of people from different backgrounds and levels of coordination. Dance comes in many forms with many rhythms, pulses, and levels of complexity. But unlike dancing, people from different cultures and backgrounds tend to walk the same. Since the major prerequisite for marching is being able to walk, it is readily applicable to a broad range of individuals because the choreography is not elaborate. Its basic moves are easy for most people, a trait it has in common with popular dance today.

But unlike popular dance, the pleasures associated with marching are secondary to larger purposes, such as group cohesion and instant obedience to orders. People in the military do not usually march just because they like to march. Popular dance, however, is its own reward. Although Circuiteers tend to move to the common beat, they are not

regimented in their movements. Unlike marching soldiers, they are institutionally undisciplined.

Disco music utilizes the 8–, 16–, and 32–count pulses already present in martial music. After American R&B musicians began welding dance music to the firm pulse-foundation of the 32–count to create disco in the early 1970s, European disco artists added the strong, constant thump-thump-thump of German martial music. This transformation of rhythmic movement from an instrument of war into a non-militarized form was not a new innovation; war dances such as the Highland fling have been adopted by societies for peaceful expression, and marching bands had already expanded from military reviews and victory parades to non-military holiday parades, sports arenas, and marching competitions.

House music in the 1980s emerged seamlessly from disco with further refinements in pulse that would cause the energy of a song to build up and climax. Most early house music was like disco except that the pulse would shift even more firmly from 16 to 32–count, according to how the song producer "built" the song. A specific genre of house music called *progressive* would set the 32–pulse in stone, and then double the pulse to the 64– and 128–beat pulses. The music progressively gathers energy with each iteration as it surges forth in precisely measured sonic waves.[16]

The relationship between the beat and the pulse may be likened to that of particle and wave.[17] In terms of empirical observation, beats of a house music song are particular, distinct, and empirically measurable. Pulse, however, is subjective and based on the reaction of the listeners to beats-as-stimulants that behave collectively like a wave. The various pulses going on at 2, 4, 8, 16, and 32–counts combine together to help create a surge of energy that will crest and uplift the dancers. When a Circuit DJ wants to mix one song into another, the first thing the DJ looks for is the first note of the 32–count phrase in both the incoming and outgoing songs so that the greater pulse is not disrupted during the shift from one song to the next.

Circuit DJs go beyond the 32–count when they want to make the crowd climax. During the 1990s, adherence to 64– (two to the sixth power), 128– (two to the seventh power), and even 256– (two to the eighth power) count pulses became part of the structure of Circuit music. In order not to disrupt the larger-count surge-pulse, Circuit DJs

16. Some of my sources indicate that progressive house got its inspiration from Gay DJs who first remixed dance music according to a stricter 32-count format. These pioneers include Jimmy Stuard and Frankie Knuckles.
17. Within Circuit discourse, the particle-wave analogy is most often expressed in the merging of the individual into the "sea of men."

may go further than simply matching songs up at the 32–count, and opt to synchronize incoming and outgoing songs with the 64, 128, or 256 build up. The predictability of the pulse in Circuit musical format makes it easier for the participant-dancer to synchronize personal performance with a song, even when it is heard for the first time.

It is also important to consider that rather narrow range of beats per minute (bpm) that is found in Circuit music. Most U.S. marches are about 120 bpm, about the pace of an energetic (but not rapid) walk. "Double-time" or jogging is about 145 bpm. Circuit music BPM is between 125–135 bpm, between a walk and a jog. It also approximates the bpm of the average heartbeat when walking at that same pace. 125–135 bpm is energetic enough to keep people alert, but not so fast that it wears them out too quickly.[18]

Circuit DJs have found that participants can be whipped into a frenzy when using higher-count iterations (which carry all of the lesser pulses within the longer count). It is up to the person who remixes the song in the Circuit pulse format as to which iterations carry the strongest surge in the song's sonic build up. If a song was not originally produced with Circuit sensibilities, the remixer will modify it to build up to the 64, 128, and 256 beats per iteration because the original structure of most songs does not assign a strong pulse higher than 32 beats. These higher iterations run the risk of becoming tedious rather than progressively more intense. That is why an undercurrent of syncopation is introduced and then elaborated as the song progresses. In the midst of structure, there is a constant and repeated undercutting of order with repeated patterns of syncopation and the melodic *hook*, as described by DJ Tony Moran[19]:

> Most people are generally attracted to "hooks." A hook is a signature musical refrain that is repeated throughout a song. That refrain relaxes the mind and makes the body feel as it were a hand being fitted into the perfect glove. Vocal or instrumental hooks can provide the same feeling of comfortable anticipation to hear it again. (personal communication, January 2008)

People dancing to a song first familiarize themselves with its rhythms, then they strike a balance and express those rhythms in their movements. Over-familiarity with a song and its rhythms, however,

18. DJ Dadt concurs with me on this observation. Raves, which attract a younger crowd than the Circuit, tend to have a much broader range of bpm. Most of Rave music is more rapid than Circuit music, with a range from 135–170 bpm (except in the "chill" or non-dancing areas for relaxation, where the music could be anywhere from 80–115 bpm).
19. Tony Moran is leading DJ/remixer in the Circuit world, as well as a renowned musician, songwriter, singer, and remixer of popular music worldwide.

means the song can no longer stimulate the crowd, hence the reason why DJs must constantly update their musical portfolio.

Higher iterations of Circuit music are accompanied by a sonic build up accomplished by doubling and quadrupling the basic thump-thump-thump measuring the song's beats per minute in a rapid-fire sonic burst just before a major 128–pulse. It creates a climactic surge that washes over the dance floor, sending participants into higher states of rhythm-induced pleasure that they in turn translate into more vigorous dancing, hands in the air, ear-to-ear smiles, and shouts of joy.

DJ Dadt explains the sonic build-up as a fairly common technique for showmanship that has been around for a long time:

> This has been used historically at performances, such as magic shows, where a drum build up climaxes with a single hit of the drum cymbal as the magician completes his [sic] trick. While both are used for separate ends, the concept is similar. (personal communication, January 2008)

Most house music dancing (including Circuit dancing) is from side to side, stepping twice with one foot at a time and completing a full-body movement in four beats. Like marching, this basic step is based on walking and is simple enough for most people from different cultures and different levels of coordination to perform. Once that step is learned, dancers are free to elaborate and perform with individual expression far beyond what is allowable for soldiers in formation. But Circuit dancers tend to have sharper moves than the usual clubgoers because of Circuiteers' awareness of pulse. Obedience to the four-count and the higher powers of two is especially strong in the Circuit community because of the importance of a clear, regular pulse that the dancers can strike on the 16–, 32–, 64–, and 128–count iterations right as the music peaks. The discipline applied to the multi-layered pulse of Circuit music, much more strict and consistent than house music in general, takes attention away from the DJ and puts it firmly on the participants who, when their level of performance is enhanced by a competent DJ, bond with that DJ even more.

Just as fidelity to the 32–count pulse is what makes martial music ideal for marchers, so do the intricate syncopation plus the larger iterations of 64, 128, and 256 make Circuit music *dancer's music* above all else. It also makes Circuit music unfit for marching; all of those additional pulses tend to summon much more motion than simply walking. Hips, arms, shoulders, and head start moving as well, and all that extra movement associated with individual expression would disrupt the streamlined conformity of disciplined military formations. Tony Moran describes the difference between military marching and Circuit dancing:

> The marching drum that has evolved into the Circuit tribal drum does not demand submission to a trend. It is a path to expression, and I have seen those who are not necessarily familiar with it pick it up with ease. (personal communication, January 2008)

The Segue

Another important factor in the narrow range of bpm and adherence to the 32–count in Circuit music is manipulation of the segue between songs. Since the basic rhythmic format of songs is similar, it is possible for DJs to do more than simply switch from one song to another seamlessly in the manner of a marching band. DJs may also blend two songs together, creating a temporary composition that only exists for the moments when the songs can comfortably overlap.

Creating an extended segue is extremely difficult to do with songs that are recorded live in their entirety. When a group of musicians performs a piece, the tempo fluctuates according to the rhythms of that group at that moment. Mixing such a song with another live song that has its own petite fluctuations is a real problem.

DJ Abel (Abel Aguilera), an artist whose career goes back to the days of disco, told me that creating a segue with disco music was a nightmare. Most disco songs were recorded live, with only the introductions and perhaps the endings looped (repeating the same recording of a measure several times). A segue was not possible if the riffs of a song were not spliced out and replicated over and over again, a time-consuming process at that time because the only means for doing this was to actually splice together reel-to-reel recording tape by hand. Before electronic music (songs that are precisely measured out through computer-generated sound and/or computer remixing), DJs had to abruptly end one song and immediately begin the next song at exactly the next beat. "You had to karate chop them," said Abel (interview, February 2008).

Music artists and producers like Giorgio Moroder, Patrick Cowley, Kraftwerk, and New Order led the way in producing the necessary rhythmic precision that would allow DJs to explore the possibilities of the segue. A new genre of music, *freestyle*, married the clean sounds and discipline of electronica to R&B vocals, ushering in the age of the remixers, artists who would restructure songs specifically for the DJ and tailor them exclusively to the dancers. Music producer/DJs, such as Tony Moran and Ralphi Rosario, pioneered the new technology and are big names in the industry at large as well as Circuit icons.

This technological innovation takes the dynamics of the dance floor even further from those of the parade ground and the sacred space of classical African ritual. These segues can be quite stunning when done adroitly. Circuiteers tend to know their music. When a DJ blends songs,

the result is a musical treat in which the previous song interweaves with the upcoming song, often before the audience knows what the new song is. The blend usually hits the dancers unconsciously before they realize what the DJ is doing, creeping up on their awareness like a rising tide. The new rhythms tease participants as they try to determine the identity of the new song. The surge of recognition renders the familiar (which too easily translates as *boring*) into something fresh and delightful. Like a strong pulse, a good segue energizes the dancers. It is my aesthetic opinion that God lives in the fierceness generated by a well woven segue.

The importance of iterations beyond the 32–count, the double time of beats just before a major pulse, and the magic of a fierce segue in Circuit musical technology reflect the goals of the Circuit experience: energize, unite, and psychologically transport/transform the dancers into one collective body-mind. Military marching can get soldiers from Point A to Point B and/or allow them to display themselves in all of their serious finery as a unified corps. The Circuit is also about display, but it is not limited to the presentation of military *gravitas* and sameness any more than it seeks to evoke the grandeur of the Orixás in a Candomblé festa. All of the intricate beats and surges will bring forth different levels of playfulness and skill from participants, giving everyone the chance to excel or simply have fun. Within this on-the-spot innovative frame, the Circuit is also designed to launch participants as a corps into progressively more intense levels of pleasure for pleasure's sake as participants perform for the crowd and their own amusement. The build up of energy moves the Circuit corps, not from place to place, but from normalcy to increasingly richer states of ecstasy.

Commentary: Tony Moran

Los Angeles
January 2007

To see an ocean of people on a dance floor in rhythmic sync, as if they all were trained to dance as one, is just a spectacle. Playing in venues around the world allows me to watch infectious rhythms and melodies flow together to translate into a bounce that is beautiful.

My first observation of the startling degree of rhythmic unification was at a bar called Hydrate in Chicago. Hydrate's relevance as part of Gay history is undisputed. Its name at that time was the Manhole. You had to check your shirt upon entrance to the dance floor.

It was packed that night, and I was lucky enough to have been allowed to use the owner's bathroom downstairs; the regular bathrooms were pretty insane. People wore shoes or boots more back then, and it really made some noise. The office and bathroom were directly below the dance floor. I would say that there were about 500 guys dancing to the same song at the same time, all stomping to the same song with some people doing slightly fancier variations that fit into that stomping pulse. With those variations, it sounded like a percussion session was going on up there. And the percussionists were an army of dancing queens. I had to pause for awhile after doing my business because I was so fascinated how it thundered with such synchronization. I wish I could have recorded it and sampled it [inserted it into a song]. Equally impressive was how most were marching to that same beat. It sounded as if they had trained to be in sync.

To watch people dance has a different effect because you don't notice as much about their feet when you are watching their faces and hand movements that give each individual their own personal dance technique. Over the years that I have played at what is now Hydrate, the same pulse of stomping feet continues to resonate in the same way through the evolution of disco music to house music and now my specialties, tribal music and anthems.

When you play music in a city like Rio de Janeiro, you would swear that they all have PhDs in passionate tribal dance. It just does not look that good anywhere else. From my DJ booth, you witness a symphony of sexual tactical maneuvers that make each body part an instrument. To watch a sea of that happening with about 10,000 people dancing in front of me just brought tears to my eyes again and again. They were dancing purely from their hearts and the sheer devotion can be only compared to prayer from my point of view, a prayer of giving thanks

that they are here and that they can rejoice just to be alive. Wow! That is how the Cariocas [residents of Rio] of Brazil do it.

Of course, as we all dance, we can all be like peacocks, moving to generate interest by one or many in a homoerotic way. That is a given. No matter how shy you may be, there has to be a time when you are looking to get someone's attention. I can look back to the time of the ancient Greek and Romans to just to give a few examples. That must have looked pretty damn glorious, singing songs that boost their egos and boast of their manhood and conquests. To each other, that is. What better way to go off to battle and sacrifice your life than to be made to feel that your manhood had substance and that you would be willing to die or kill to keep it and chant and dance again with your brothers?

The dance movements have changed as dance music has evolved. The foundation, *the pulse*, is always there. That pulse is the engine that drives the rest of our musical and rhythmic parts. Our hearts are drawn by it. Our feet tap to it while we eat at the dinner table. It's just a part of us and I am glad it is. Pulsating tribal rhythm is the foundation of almost all my remixes.

When I play my music, I am not counting the beats. It is an instinctive feeling that happens to go by the rules and guidelines of music. As I mix together variations of tribal and dance music, my mission is to keep that pulse ever pounding. I color the pulse and merge beats into a family of pulses that change and converge in my signature anthemic style [*anthemic* is when a song becomes an industry standard and people sing along]. Those colors guide me and us through the "journey," and it is a special journey for me every time. I guess the word "Circuit" must have come about from seeing many of the same faces traveling to different destinations to experience that journey. I see many of the same faces in the most unlikely of places: Thailand, Japan, Sydney, then Fire Island and LA, just to name a few.

The lyrical content and the performances that range from sublime to anthemic have enhanced and spread the finite pulsing march into an extended journey. This has allowed the homoerotic tension to last for more than the average act of dance floor foreplay. There is torso-to-torso action and reaction, amplified and eroticized as it comes out of the speakers and into men's testosterone banks. I've seen it at every party I've ever played from Alegria/ NYC to White Party.

Whatever you want to call it, it brings people together to rejoice. We each have our ways to make our climaxes, and I love to climax and build people up to a place where it feels like cool water has been sprayed onto a face sweating in the hot sun. I like to see the smiles as I watch friends and strangers embracing each other when I drop the

drums out and air fills the room (from a psychological standpoint). I am normally in a booth or on a stage where I am experiencing many of the same feelings.

Part 4

Ecstasy

Lynn McStatts, www.personalpaparazzial.com

Rogerio Mesquita

DJ Paulo promo

Chapter 13

The DJ

People think I do this because it's cool. No!
I am a DJ because I can't help myself.

—DJ Tony Moran

The most important professionals in the Circuit are the DJs. In a groundbreaking study of the Gay male party scene in Sydney, Australia, Lynnette Lewis and Michael Ross state that DJs carry the highest status as sacred persons. Party promoters and drug distributors, who likewise occupy positions of power similar to that of religious leaders, are not given the same level of reverence (146–48).

In standard American masculine discourse, one's status as a man is greatly increased by being a member of elite masculine teams, most of which are military or paramilitary in design. Men who are soldiers, police, firefighters, lifeguards, and contact sports athletes enjoy a heightened sense of masculinity. Each of these teams has its moments of ecstatic expression through exhibition of the *corps*, a performance in which teammates merge into one body, be it during a parade, a victory, a party, or a funeral for a fallen comrade. At these moments, each participant's identity is writ large, and if they are men, their fellows confirm their masculine identity. If they are women, they may receive honorary masculine status as well.[1]

The military/paramilitary/team sports models differ from the Circuit in substantial ways. The social mechanisms for conformity in the Circuit are subtler. For all of the Circuit's "clone" tendencies, there is no set Circuit uniform, no chain of command, no standard for rules

1. Carol Burke concurs with me on the notion that women joining these teams may be granted honorary masculine status. Pilot (a graduate from the United States Air Force Academy who wishes to remain anonymous) disagrees. He finds such a notion insulting to the women officers with which he has served (personal communication, April 2008).

of engagement in the disciplined, no-nonsense fulfillment of one's duty. Duty, in fact, is not an issue.

There is one striking similarity shared by the soldier and the Circuiteer. In the military, soldiers in formation listen to one voice that calls them to attention, directs them, and sings cadence for them to march together. That lone voice helps them to become one entity. The equivalent of that lone voice in the Circuit is the DJ.

The purpose of marching is to change individuals into a united *corps*, the French word for "body." Its unity is recognized as a collective entity called the *esprit de corps*, the spirit of the communal body. When I was in Marine Corps boot camp, my drill instructors (who sang to us as we marched) used the term *esprit de corps* for what they wanted to instill in us. Body-mind unity of the sports team (and the fans who adore them) is described as *team spirit*, somewhat equivalent to the military's esprit de corps.

Team spirit of whatever team can be spiritual. The spirit of the group is evidence for its members that they are more than just material beings. There is a sense of life after death when one belongs to a team because usually the team survives even when individual members die. These sentiments for esprit de corps are present in secular as well as religious institutions and expressed by atheists as well as true believers.

I am not *reducing* the spiritual to group solidarity, nor do I subscribe to a neo-Durkheimian view that spirituality can be explained away thus. Group solidarity (especially transcendent solidarity) has the potential to invoke and *perform* the spiritual, regardless of religious (or anti-religious) context.

Like marching soldiers, the Circuit community generates a spectacle by performers for performers. When they move together, Circuiteers bring their bodies in sync with each other. As go their bodies, so go their minds. The DJ vicariously "sings" Circuit cadence through songs and rhythms by which the group will move.

But a DJ does more than just set the beat. The "one voice" of the DJ is composed of the many voices, instruments, and songs played in the course of an evening. The crowd is not summoned by the actual voice of the DJ, who does not speak directly to the crowd. It is the DJ's chorus of songs, a whole series of works put together by multiple artists, which transforms individuals into a pulsing group entity. Selection of each song is a strategy, a maneuver by the DJ designed to bring out the desire for performance and help participants overcome their own collective hang-ups and anxieties. The greatest pleasures of the Circuit are only possible when the DJ coaxes the crowd into becoming a single corporate body. When asked about his role in transforming a bunch of strangers into a moving, pulsing unity. DJ Paulo says:

> It's just the magic that happens when all the elements are right; it's hard to describe. You get a connection with the crowd and they allow you to take them "places." A lot of DJs will tell you, "I got them in my palm." That's the moment when you have grabbed their attention and the crowd as a whole will allow you to take them. Having said that, it's easy to lose them too, so you have to balance what you do when working with the dance floor. (Weems "Serious Fun" 22)

The most popular metaphor for what DJs say they do is sex. The notion that DJs would be engaged in metaphoric sonic-based sex with a group of horny Gay men is not terribly surprising, considering the context.

But a sizable minority of DJs in the Circuit are Lesbians.[2] In fact, I first heard the sex metaphor from DJ Susan Morabito, who stated that the sex metaphor is just that, only a metaphor. It is the best way she knows to convey the experience of DJing and connecting with the crowd. "Sex is the analogy I use because everybody can relate to it," she says. "It's pretty impossible for people to really relate to DJing if they have never done it." Morabito also sees no difference between the sex and the journey metaphors. "Sex *is* a journey," she adds (Weems, "The Circuit" 190).

When we look closely at the quote by DJ Paulo, he explicitly describes DJing at its best as the moment when the crowd allows the DJ to take them places, (i.e., a journey). Later, he says that the crowd will allow the DJ to "take them," which is a common euphemism for sex. This tacitly confirms that, as Morabito says, sex is indeed a journey.

DJ art is all about creating the moment according to the needs of the moment. Like good lovers, DJs react to the immediate desires of the beloved. Competent DJs are extremely sensitive to the temperament of the crowd and will only pre-plan an evening to a certain extent. Since the places and people change constantly, it is important for the DJs to be flexible in their program of music. What works in one city on a Friday night may not work in another city on a Saturday night. By watching and "feeling" their crowd, DJs fine-tune their selection so that it is specifically designed for that group on that date.

In order to win the crowd and then propel it into a state of communal ecstasy, the DJ must behave like a sensitive lover, gently stripping the participant of awkward self-consciousness. All of this happens without the need for words or physical contact—DJs touch participants through

2. This includes Susan Morabito (NYC), Wendy Hunt (Ft. Lauderdale), Sharon White (NYC), Lydia Prim (Birmingham, Alabama), Kimberly S (Spalding, Los Angeles), Alyson Calagna (Ft. Lauderdale), Ana Paula (Rio de Janeiro), and DJ Pride (Yvette Fernandez, Miami). All of these women are Lesbians; I cannot think of a single nationally known DJ who is a Straight woman, although Victor Calderone (NYC), Chris Cox (Los Angeles), and Joe Bermudez (Boston) are Straight men.

their musical selection. This creates a *simpatico* between the chooser of the music, the music itself, and the recipient. The greatest ecstasy for both the DJ and the dancer is when the music saturates and penetrates them both, body and soul, and they see this rapture in each other.

Nevertheless, the DJ is always dominant in the "sex act." According to DJ Ra (Wade Maggert), the DJ "fucks the crowd on a good night" (interview, April 2001). Since the Gay masculine body can be sexually penetrated without losing its masculinity and since the dominant partner in the sex act can be the one who is penetrated, sexual descriptions of the DJ-dancer relationship are remarkably fluid, even when the DJ is a woman or a Straight man. This, in fact, adds to the hilarity when a female DJ is told that "You worked my pussy!" by a male admirer.

This also means that the male DJ is not always gendered as masculine. One of the biggest compliments a DJ can get is if the music (or the DJ) is called "cunty" or if an agitated fan looks the DJ in the eye and screams, "WORK, BITCH!"

Sexual language in Circuit parlance reflects and amplifies the dynamics of playful sonic seduction. According to DJ Susan Morabito, a good evening begins with foreplay, when the DJ stimulates each individual until participants make their way onto the floor. When enough of the crowd has been successfully wooed, the DJ can play a song at just the right time and trigger a rush of energy from the crowd. DJ Don Bishop calls this "tickling the prostate" (interview, November 2002). Bishop lists three requirements for DJing: count to thirty-two, drive a car (adjust the speed), and a thorough understanding of anal sex to place songs in the set that have similar qualities of a sexual orgasm. "If you are a good top or bottom," he says, "you know just when the feeling is just right. If you get this while DJing, you place your songs to build and build until you pop" (interview, July 2003).

Once the crowd reaches critical mass and most of the dancers take off their shirts, the DJ then shifts musical gears to make them climax, typically marked by shouts, hands in the air, and smiles. Expressing the intensity of climax for the DJ and the dancer, DJ Joe Bermudez compares the pivotal climactic song to ejaculation (literally, "the cum shot"), an interesting choice of words for Bermudez, a Straight DJ, to use when referring to his relationship with a predominantly Gay crowd (interview, July 2003).[3]

At the end of the set, says Morabito, the DJ-as-lover eases the intensity of the rhythms and cuddles with the dancers until it is time for

3. Bermudez feels that the sex metaphor adroitly conveys the depth of pleasure possible for both sides in the DJ-dancer experience, adding, "When you're really fucking somebody, you don't have to ask if they're having a great time" (interview, July 2003).

them to leave. There has been controversy concerning the cuddling period; some DJs are afraid to let the dancers down gently for fear that those who are not ready to come down will simply leave early. Others deem it necessary so that people are not tempted to party beyond what is good for them.

It may seem a paradox to use sexual language to describe the DJ-participant experience, especially since the DJ is removed from the crowd and does not actually touch the participants. This use of sexual imagery can be seen as a fondness for exaggerated and hyperbolic wordplay in the community's verbal performance. But the sex metaphor need not be simply a metaphor; some DJs report feeling aroused when connecting with the crowd. In a panel discussion about sex and the DJ, Alyson Calagna reported once having an orgasm while spinning.[4] The sex metaphor reflects the profoundly sublime pleasure felt by the DJ and the participants, and resembles the use of sex/journey metaphors by mystics to describe their own experiences of ecstatic joy.

The journey metaphor is best understood in the context of crowd dynamics. The Circuit gathering is not just a large group. It must literally be a crowd, bodies close to each other for no other reason than the closeness, as if proximity overrides all other considerations. There should be just enough room on the dance floor for the dancers to move or the venue will be considered too large. It is also preferable that the crowd be visible in its entirety, numerous and close-knit. When seen from a few feet up, the crowd should resemble its most popular metaphor: a sea of men.

In this required closeness, the crowd takes on the characteristics of wayfarers who swim in the communal sea and travel together under the guidance of the DJ. The journey is more properly an individual and communal *quest*. Each traveler may go through any number of adventures, defeats, and triumphs in a constantly changing milieu of interpersonal vignettes. The dance floor is an arena for any number of contests for attention. Guys will flirt, snub, and bond with others outside of their immediate circle of friends. If somebody is found to be sufficiently attractive, he may later be sent on his way as his erstwhile suitor makes a bid to trade up for someone even more desirable; relationships between strangers are in constant flux. For many individuals, a Circuit party is high drama, complete with triumphs, defeats, and glorious moments when such things as winning and losing become trivial in the lived experience of transcendent solidarity.

4. "DJs. Sex, Women and Men," Qualia Festival of Gay Folklife, Columbus, Ohio, April 3, 2004.

Since the participants in the Circuit come from a broad range of backgrounds, looks, regions, and musical tastes, it is a challenge for the DJ to bring them together as a team. Circuiteers arrive with their own cliques, inhibitions, and prejudices. A good DJ first generates a communal heartbeat that demands everyone's participation. As mentioned earlier, the music in a Circuit party is usually within 125–135 beats per minute, about the same rate as a human heartbeat during a brisk walk. Continuous flow is key—there are few times when it is acceptable to noticeably stop, slow down, or speed up the bpm past this narrow range. The DJ will not use speech to encourage the crowd because that would disturb the flow and displace the crowd as the center of attention. Through adroit musical selection, a good DJ progressively raises the level of excitement. The crowd exhibits its own *esprit de corps* and moves together as a team to reach the common goal of shared rapture.

DJs live for the moment when they lead the crowd through the maze of potentially devastating trials and tribulations to a "place" where all pretensions and hang-ups shatter in the shimmering ecstasy of the living communal pulse.[5] These moments are marked by their irresistibleness and hilarity—nobody remains outside of the shared joy—sometimes even the bartenders and other staff dance.

Most DJs that I have interviewed are highly intelligent, and this creates a dilemma for them, especially if they are in demand: how can they play music night after night and not get insanely bored?

In order to keep up with current music, good DJs will spend hours every week going over the latest releases. Some have developed the skills to remix songs (digitally change the original) before presenting them to their fans. Every conscientious DJ wants to be on the cutting edge and earn the reputation for producing a special night of superb music, not the same old songs that every major club across the country plays. As DJ Paulo puts it,

> I spend hours searching for new music, editing music, doing mixes, and remixing mixes to get things to sound the way I'd like them.... If I played what the previous weekend's DJ played, why would anyone go out? (Weems, "Serious Fun")

It is through individual tastes mixed with crowd expectations that DJs produce the musical ambience of an evening. Alyson Calagna and

5. DJ Julian Marsh mentioned that the DJ and the crowd feel the pleasure of the Circuit in aspects including its transcendence and solidarity. What many people do not realize is that the journey can be every bit as intense and desirable for the DJ as it is for the dancers. To interrupt a DJ with conversation at the wrong time is to deprive the DJ of pleasure, just as if someone interrupts a person dancing with abandon (Weems, "The Circuit" 204).

Roland Belmares compare the art of balancing all of these factors to cooking. Calagna, who hails from Louisiana, has this to say about the DJ-as-chef:

> Any good Cajun chef knows it takes the finest ingredients and just the right balance of spices and flavors to create a kick-ass pot of gumbo. The same principles apply when I play my music. I choose my records delicately and specifically for the crowd (personal communication, May 2007)

The musical selection of the DJ-as-chef can be seasoned with different genres, sound effects, samples from other songs played simultaneously, excerpts from movies or speeches, and lyrics in various languages. Belmares (Austin, Texas) speaks of DJing-as-cooking in much the same language as the journey metaphor:

> My recipe for a good night is like boiling a pot of water. You start it off with a nice simmer, and throughout the night, you raise the temperature slowly bringing things to a boil. Then when everyone is "well done," you bring it back down to simmer to finish things off. (personal communication, May 2007)

On June 28, 2008, I watched DJ Hector Fonseca spin heavy tribal for almost two hours during Boot Camp, Toronto Prism's military ball. He used multiple CD players at the same time within the same song, adding sounds, beats, and background melodies with such precision that, had I not been watching, I would have assumed that he was only playing one pre-mixed track on one CD player. Not all Circuiteers have witnessed for themselves the skill it takes for a truly gifted DJ to coordinate so many elements (flavors as it were) in the mix within a song, not just between songs.

In addition to the songs that DJs mix together during an evening, there is also the folk technology developed by predominantly Gay DJs to remix the songs and loop the various measures, melodies, hooks, and rhythmic phrases over and over again with computerized precision in the sound studio before the songs reach the DJ booth. DJ Abel said the remixes he does with Ralphi Rosario as the duo Rosabel are created with two things in mind: the original artist and the dance floor. "We think about the dance floor more than ourselves when we build something," he said. "Both of us are Gay, and both of us love to dance. We understand our people," referring to the difference in sound that mostly Straight remixers/DJs create for predominantly Straight dancers (interview, January/February 2008). "Gay men want a feel-good message—something that's *fun*," said Ralphi Rosario. Emphasizing the importance

of the body-music connection for Gay men, he added, "You have to feel that shit in your wrist, your chest, your hips" (interview, March 2008).

This difference between Straight and Gay is nowhere more apparent than the spatial orientation of bodies on the dance floor. In a Straight house music venue, as mentioned earlier, the crowd faces the DJ for almost the entire performance.[6] Gay men and their allies are different; their communal self only focuses its attention on the DJ and faces the booth when the music peaks, at the moment of collective climax. For the most part, Gay men are too busy focusing on each other.

Most DJs feel the need to teach as well as entertain. Since they may spend the better part of each day searching for new music that could enrich their repertoire, DJs often get excited when they find something that they think will really work the crowd. There is a sense of professional one-upmanship, the desire to show other DJs in attendance that whoever is in charge of the music really *knows* the music. There is also instant gratification when a DJ adroitly places a particularly fitting song into the set and the crowd roars its approval.

But the crowd does not always accept what the DJ offers. I can remember being in a club with DJ Joe Gauthreaux spinning that night. The music was rich, soulful, and much of it was brand new. But the crowd was reluctant to dance, so Gauthreaux put on some hard-pounding, mindless tunes to shake them out of their reluctance. Perversely, the crowd then hit the dance floor. When I asked him about it, he said, "I tried to educate them."

The Great Divide

A pronounced rift in musical tastes among participants has made it even more difficult for DJs to do more than just repetitively play the same hits *ad nauseum*. Most DJs blame the rift on excessive crystal use; one popular DJ (who wishes to remain anonymous) compares the rise of crystal meth use in the Circuit to the black plague (personal communication, April 2007).

Since about 1999, the Circuit scene has witnessed increasing popularity of two controversial substances: GHB and crystal methamphetamine. Besides the negative impact of increased health risks due to irresponsible use of these drugs compared to other intoxicants, there is a marked effect on musical preference with crystal meth. Popular folk wisdom divides participants into two camps: the ecstasy-ketamine "lovey" group and the crystal "bitchy" group.

The Great Divide is admirably expressed in the Spring 2004 issue of *Circuit Noize*:

6. One exception to this rule are those venues that feature deep house DJs.

"This music sucks, this crowd is ugly and I hate this space!"

"Hon, read your ticket. This is section E [ecstasy or MDMA]. You belong over there in section T [Tina or crystal meth]."

Oh, I thought so—way too many fucking smiles over here." (75)

Those who use MDMA and ketamine tend to favor melodic deep house music sound featuring gospel, Latin, and Afro-pop influences as well as African-Latin tribal tracks in keeping with the emotional and introspective states that are the trademarks of X and K. Crystal meth users tend to respond better to not-so-subtle techno-tribal music with a strong, driving beat as well as techno-oriented remixes of screaming diva music. Beats per minute also tend to be faster for the crystal crowd, reflecting the hyper-alertness and shortened attention spans that come with two to three nights of no-sleep tweaking.

Like most stereotypes, this division is oversimplified. Most people who use illegal substances will mix them up in a variety of ways. Those who use GHB will often use crystal meth to keep from "swirling out" or "falling out" (overdosing and falling into a state of unconsciousness). Oftentimes, both GHB and crystal are often used in conjunction with MDMA.[7] Plenty of MDMA-ketamine Circuiteers love techno house music, and more than a few crystal lovers adore deep house. There is no obvious connection that users of one set of drugs are somehow more spiritual than another group, especially since so many people in the scene utilize three or more substances at the same time.

In general, however, this division seems to hold true in terms of musical preferences. There appears to be a correlation between crystal use and faster, noisier music. Ecstasy, on the other hand, enhances emotional response to music, so melody tends to be more valued by participants who are on MDMA. Since about 1998, the chasm between the two camps has grown worse every year. In 2005–2006, there were signs that the rift was mending as excessive drug use seems to be on the decline. Yet, the healing has been slow.

This has almost put the DJ-as-teacher on the Endangered Species List. DJs are tempted to "play it safe" and give the crowd mediocre music that everyone can accept.

The Great Divide has also made things easier for the DJ poseur—a person who is not qualified in terms of mixing ability or musical sophistication—who plays pre-mixed CDs for the duration of an evening and may even claim superstar status for reasons other than professional skill. Many reputable DJs, who have spent their lives giving their best

7. Rarely, however, is K used in conjunction with GHB. Popular folk wisdom on intoxicants forbids the mixing of GHB with ketamine or alcohol.

to the crowd, are disheartened by the pressure on them to play only mediocre music and the casual acceptance of the DJ-pretender (who might have the ability to mix on the spot but is too lazy to do so consistently) in their midst. These things have affected the scene adversely, turning off former enthusiasts and reducing the numbers of attendees. The more cynical participants no longer consider the DJ to be anything other than a glorified jukebox.

Indeed, it is tough for the older DJs, the ones who learned to mix vinyl records without the help of machines that can match up the beats, to accept the dumbing down and degradation of their craft. The step from vinyl to CD made it possible for a pre-programmed CD to spin for eighty minutes at a time, thus taking the DJ out of the moment and undermining the crucial connection between the DJ, the music, and the dancers. Technology has undermined that connection even further; the move from CDs to computer laptops, which hold all the tunes necessary for a set in their hard drives, allows an unscrupulous DJ to pre-program an entire ten-hour set on a laptop with impunity. Until standards for DJing are codified, universally accepted, and regularly enforced by promoters, we can expect more disillusionment.

The problems arising from "playing it safe" and the *faux* DJ are not immediate; the cumulative effects most strongly influence the minority of participants who really know the music. In any Circuit crowd, a significant number of participants are simply there to get high and have sex. Others enjoy the gathering of the tribe and take pleasure being around so many Gay men dancing in one place but may not be too concerned about what songs are played. But the core group, the Circuit *aficionados* as it were, is that minority composed of those who know music, along with those who are not so informed but are moved by quality music of any genre. This combined group is an extremely influential subset that is critical of what goes their way. They also tend to be the professional DJ's best friends on the dance floor because, when the DJ puts on something different that is particularly danceable, they will be the first to enthusiastically respond to it. Others, more concerned with who is watching them, when their buzz will kick in, or with whom they want to score, may not have the confidence to hit the dance floor with something they have not yet heard on the radio or at their local bar.

The temptation to sacrifice the quality of performance is tough to resist, considering the mindless vindictive reaction of those on either side of the drug/music divide[8] and a sometimes exhausting schedule

8. Many DJs refuse to read comments about them on the various Circuit listservs precisely because of the spite that some participants express in their reviews of DJ performances.

that can take a popular DJ from coast to coast and back again on a big weekend. Talented DJs with a strong sense of integrity strive, in the words of DJ Wendy Hunt, to "always be honest and always be grateful" (personal communication, May 2007). Most DJs do their jobs very well and resist the temptation to play it safe. They give the crowd their best, and live for the moments when they and the crowd become one.

Commentary: Wendy Hunt

Provincetown/Ft. Lauderdale
December 2007

I am a woman and a DJ in the Circuit who has been in the Circuit as long as it's been the Circuit [thirty-four years]. I have spun events for the majority of the traditional Circuit parties.

Women have played a significant role in the Circuit, believe it or not. As part of the dance floor tribe, they are there for the exact same reasons as their male counterparts. Women as Circuit DJs are Gay men swathed in women's bodies.

My sister was in the Navy for a brief period of time. The only thing she really liked about the experience were the times when, as you said, "soldiers in formation listen to one voice that calls them to attention, directs them, and sings cadence for them to march together. That lone voice helps them to become one being." And then, in regards to your chapter, you then make the analogy of, "The equivalent in the Circuit is the DJ." That was a smooth segue!

As an avid New England Patriots fan, I can completely relate to your saying, "Body-mind unity of the sports team (and the fans who adore them) is described as *team spirit*, somewhat equivalent to the military's *esprit de corps."* Even watching a game on TV, with my team playing in another city and state, I feel that team spirit or *esprit de corps*.

You go on to talk about the spirituality of team spirit "of whatever team." The music brings spirituality to the party as well. It doesn't have to be gospel-tinged to feel like you're in church. When in attendance at the Saint, it *was* like being at church. The revelers would participate vocally as if in a Baptist church in the South on a Sunday morning. At the very peak moment of the party, the planetarium ceiling would open at the top and a cluster of mirrored balls would lower, the lights would shine on them, and people would worship those balls (notice the sexual connotation there) as though they were God. The music would dictate when that moment would happen.

I completely agree with all of the sexual analogies and have had my share of highly sexual moments while spinning, coming (no pun intended) just short of orgasm. If the DJ is doing her/his job correctly, they *should* feel a oneness with their crowd, as is the case in a sexual experience. I like Susan Morabito's reference to the end of the evening (or morning) as "cuddling" with the crowd. I reference those DJs who are "afraid to let the dancers down gently for fear that those who are not ready to come down will simply leave early." I consider this a lack of

experience and fear of moving outside of their comfort zone. However, I do agree that there are exceptions to that rule, and it's generally a drug-related thing.

You said, "DJs live for the moment when they lead the crowd through the maze of potentially devastating trials and tribulations to a place where all pretensions and hang-ups shatter in the shimmering ecstasy of the living communal pulse." When I spin in P-Town [Provincetown, Massachusetts] every summer, it truly is "coming home." On the night that I spin, it feels like my entire family is present.

Music preparation is a lot more time consuming than anyone could possibly think. If DJs were paid for those hours as well as the live performance hours, most of us would make a lot more money per engagement. I, too, spend hours sifting through some great and some really bad music for public play.

I notice a lot more DJs trying to over-educate their crowds. No one wants to hear all new music for an entire evening. People want to hear their favorite songs. That said, it's up to the DJ to know how to keep the crowd happy while still being able to sneak some fabulous new stuff in. This is the stuff they'll be dying over in about four to six months. Don't try to shove your favorite stuff down their throats. If no one is on the dance floor, the DJ is doing something wrong unless the building is empty. For myself, I only accept gigs where I can musically be myself. I have to have fun or I, admittedly, become very bored.

I really don't want to get into the whole drug thing that you touched upon. I'll just say the boys look a little prettier at events when the sun is shining!

Chapter 14

Stepping Out

Some of the dancers are on drugs and enter the discotheque with the radiant faces of the Magi coming to adore the Christ Child; others, who are not, enter with a bored expression, as if this is the last thing they want to do tonight. In half an hour they are indistinguishable, sweat-stained, ecstatic, lost.

—Andrew Holleran, *Dancer from the Dance* (115)

Ecstasy[1] is the common goal for those who wish to push things outside of their normal boxes, including themselves. Although most societies allow some form of ecstatic expression, undisciplined ecstasy is often considered dangerously excessive because it may lead to transgressive behavior. Substances and behaviors that produce ecstasy are often closely policed or even banned to ensure that chaos does not spill out and undermine the political and religious institutions that guarantee stability and safety. But there are always undisciplined outlaws—people stepping out of line—who live for ecstatic experiences not regulated by licensed institutions. This includes groups of men who perform their masculinity in ways that their respective societies promote, such as the military, and in ways that their societies find problematic, such as terrorists and Circuiteers.

1. The *American Heritage College Dictionary* defines ecstasy as "1. Intense joy or delight. 2. A state of emotion so intense that one is carried beyond rational thought and self-control: *an ecstasy of rage.* 3. The trance, frenzy, or rapture associated with mystic or prophetic exaltation" (435). It also refers to MDMA, a recreational drug that is favored by Ravers and Circuiteers. *Exstasis,* the Latin root of the word, means "terror." Its older Greek root, *ekstasis*, means "astonishment, distraction." The actual word-blocks that make it up are *ex* (out of) and *stasis* (standstill). Ecstasy signifies a dramatic shift from static to dynamic. It implies action, movement out of place, going outside of oneself in a state of emotional agitation (as in "I was beside myself with happiness"), stepping out of the ordinary.

Bill Haberkam and JustCircuit, www.justcircuit.com

Dance floor dynamics as seen from above

In order to better understand the nonviolent spiritual masculinity of Circuiteers, I will compare it with the holy bond that unites people in terrorist organizations, and explore further the sacred *esprit de corps* of soldiers.

Fierce Solidarity

Circuit folk spirituality involves the secular performance of ecstatic communal dance. In this context, "ecstasy" may be defined as a key ingredient for the production of transcendent solidarity. As mentioned earlier, I call this particular Circuit phenomenon "fierce solidarity" to include a folk term (fierce) in a playful manner that reflects humor and the premium placed on self-affirmation in the Circuit. Because the Circuit community resists religious codification, participants are free to interpret their experiences as ecstatic beings according to the cosmology of their choice, or no cosmology at all.

The Circuit possesses its own undisciplined folk spirituality as an ecstatic practice without, as Barbara Walker Lloyd puts it, an "institutionally sanctioned and codified doctrine" (6). As mentioned in the Preface, it is not what David Hufford would call a spiritual belief because there is no prerequisite that one believe in non-corporeal spirits ("Beings" 15). In the Circuit, the spirits they honor are their own.

This understanding of Circuit spirituality undermines the distinction between the secular and the spiritual. A remarkable amount of spiritual expression in America occurs in settings not regulated by religious institutions and not necessarily premised upon a belief in spirits. This includes homespun memorials such as small roadside shrines for traffic accident victims and massive impromptu memorials of letters, flowers, candles, and memorabilia, such as the one at the former site of the World Trade Center towers. The World Trade Center shrine was a spatial frame that allowed for religious and nonreligious performances of remembrance. Atheists were just as free to post their grief as anyone else. *Secular spirituality*[2] refers to the dizzying array of new spiritual folkways in which there is an ethic of inclusion and tolerance for framing both religious and nonreligious expression together. Secular spirituality can act as a bridge between the cosmic spirituality of religions that invoke the presence of Heaven, and the spirit of common humanity that does not need Heaven to sanctify it. In this new ethico-spiritual discipline, diversity in expression beautifies rather than divides. Circuit spirituality is one of those secular spiritual folkways.

The Circuit is ritual performance, but ritual with a Gay twist. Since Gay people come from so many ethnicities, traditional LGBTQ performance rituals (such as coming out, Pride parades, drag shows, women's music festivals, and AIDS quilt displays) encourage a broad range of individual and cultural expression within an agreed-upon communal frame. Unlike the script, which is purposely undisciplined, the setting is codified. Self-determination, individual expression, and cultural diversity become sacred and are key ethical elements. Internal contradictions that come with multiculturalism and undermine it (some cultures have well-defined performances of enmity against other cultures) are downplayed within the Gay context. Conflict is considered tacky.

2. I am not the first scholar to use this term. I have not, however, seen any other scholar unite "secular" and "spirituality" to mean what I intend in this work: an interpretive and performance frame in which multiple expressions of theistic and non-theistic transcendence and encounter with the sacred—the Universe, the Author(s) of the universe, the ground of self in relation to all things, and shared humanity at its most basic level—can co-exist.

Rituals are often understood to be formal affairs with clearly defined scripts. However, in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Catherine Bell states that formality and routine are not essential prerequisites: "Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit, or 'the dead weight of tradition'" (92–93).

By ritual performance, I mean that ritual is *framed*. Richard Bauman says, "performance sets up, or represents, an interpretative frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood, and that this frame contrasts with at least one other frame, the literal" (9). Much of performance is recognized by its frame more so than its content. One example of the symbolic nature of the performance frame is the groundbreaking ritual, when a shovel is ceremoniously pushed into the earth to symbolically begin building a structure. It is the gesture-within-frame that counts at that moment, not the efficiency of dirt removal.

Linking performance with ritual is problematic, however, because this implies that ritual can be reduced to fictitious drama (Bell 42–43). But ritual-as-drama is not fiction, even if the ritual invokes the unprovable and unbelievable. Ritual connects people to and defines people within the real, not make-believe, universe. The use of make-believe in its more elevated status as fabulous myth does not necessarily take away from the reality of ritualized encounter with the universe. Myths are designed to teach real truths. People need not believe that myth is fact for it to help them encounter, interpret, and change the world around them. Bell says that ritual "always aligns one within a series of relationship [*sic*] linked to the ultimate sources of power … it always suggests the ultimate coherence of a cosmos in which one takes a particular place" (141). In this ultimate coherence, ritual quickens myth. Ritual allows human beings to participate in epic myth-history as they cosmically situate themselves.

A ritual's spiritual importance depends upon how intense and intimate the encounter is between the performer of ritual and the universe that witnesses the performance. Religious codification of the script is secondary. When performers ritually encounter the state (e.g., a flag-raising ceremony), a deity (prayer), the dead (bringing flowers to a grave), another person (a handshake), or their own self-awareness (contemplation), their actions are spiritual to the degree in which the encounter situates the participants face-to-face with a cosmos that is likewise aware of them.

Nonfictional encounter is what makes ritual different in kind from a Broadway play because the premise of theater-based performance is its fictional framework. If one takes into account, however, that the best performances of fiction tend to assist people in their own spiritual

quests (as per the aesthetic philosophy of Abhinavagupta[3]), an adroitly performed theatrical piece behaves as if it were ritual. Devotees of stage plays such as *Rent*, *Madame Butterfly*, or *The Lion King* attend those performances in order to experience their ritual power when the truths invoked by the performance transcend the fictional quality of the script, which is the hallmark of a great performance as opposed to a mediocre one. The highly ritualized performance of opera and noh (including the behavior of the performers and the aesthetic expectations of the audience) would most certainly place an outstanding performance into the realm of ritual, and therefore would count as theatrical frames for spiritual expression. If a performance is undertaken as a symbolic act embedded in a cosmic narrative designed to effect transformation (with all the theatricality that such an embedded act implies), then it is ritual performance, even when situated in a fictional dramatic frame.

Goffman also uses a superbly applicable term: "team," which is one or more performers in a performance (*Presentation* 80). The fluidity of individual and group in Goffman's definition is perfect as a means for describing ritual performances of masculinity in which one may be a solo performer, audience, and teammate, simultaneously or in rapid succession.

Terrorism, war, and Circuit parties have dramatic ritual frames involving outlaw masculine identities, transgressive behaviors, and transcendent team solidarity that help men situate themselves in the cosmos.

The Transformative Ecstasy of Religious Terrorism as Human Sacrifice

The purpose of war is victory over enemies. When people die in battle, they are casualties of war—an unfortunate but inescapable result. The purpose of terrorism, however, is the production of victims. Although framed by many of its adherents as holy war, modern terrorism reflects many of the properties of a different religious drama: human sacrifice.[4]

3. Abhinavagupta was a tenth-century Hindu theological philosopher who argued that aesthetic pleasure could trigger transcendental religious experiences. In *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, David Haberman says, "Abhinavagupta was primarily concerned with the aesthetic experience of an audience involved in watching any good drama…. For him this experience involves a sympathetic identification … with a portrayed situation that has the ability to draw people out of their own everyday world. It is in this sense that dramatic experience is transcendental and therefore valuable" (35).

4. Juergensmeyer discusses the link between religious terrorism, theater, and human sacrifice in *Terror in the Mind of God* (165–71). My discussion is designed to further

Among the many examples in history of religious ritualized violence within a theatrical narrative, human sacrifice in pre-colonial Meso-America stands out as particularly instructive. The production of victims occurred in a complex cultural matrix involving warfare, sports, theater, religious ritual, politics, national security, manliness, masculine beauty, and personal status. The epistemological basis of these rituals was grounded on theologies of divine incarnation and resurrection.[5]

Take for example the Mexica, more commonly known as the Aztecs. Two reasons why the Aztecs sacrificed people were to help Good prevail over Evil, and to reenact cosmic dramas of conflict where the gods themselves were sacrificed. The reenactments were linked closely to warfare and sports, and the emotional incentive for human sacrifice was fear of greater destruction. According to Alison Futrell, author of *Blood in the Arena,*

> The Mexica … began their rise to power as highly stratified warrior bands.… The leadership shifted the focus of religious practice to the cult of the sun, dominated by the militant deity Huitzilopochtli who represented the powers of good in the constant universal struggle against darkness and death. Huitzilopochtli demanded continual expansion of the Aztec Empire because of his ever-growing need for the nourishment provided by human sacrifice, the majority of victims being prisoners of war. Should this nourishment not be provided, then the Mexica, indeed, the entire universe, was threatened with annihilation. (172)

The Aztecs held games in which human sacrifice played an important part in the closing ceremonies. After ritual games played between two teams, players would be sacrificed. These games were supernaturally powerful and could be oracular; the outcome might determine a course of action for the rulers of a community (Noble 65).

There were also economical and political incentives for personal gain behind the desire for human sacrifice. Providing victims could give the contributor higher social status, and mass sacrifices would serve as a warning to neighboring states to remain subservient to the supremacy of the Mexica. According to Futrell, "Moctezuma II invited enemy

show the epistemological link between human sacrifice, terrorist rhetoric, and popular American discourse on the soldier-as-hero.

5. The Mayan text *Popol Vuh* gives prominence to the "Place of Ball Game Sacrifice," which contained the altar for sacrificing ballplayers who lost (Tedlock 352). Sacrifice in Mayan legend could include the resurrection and transformation of god-victims (Tedlock 134–37). The importance of human/divine sacrifice of Jesus in Christianity, the premium placed on martyrdom, and the license given to the Inquisition for torturing people and burning them alive may have made the wholesale conversion of Central America to Catholicism much easier because it was similar to Meso-American spirituality.

leaders to his inaugural celebrations in which the best of their warriors were slaughtered by the thousands, surely a powerful object lesson for those concerned" (172).

These rituals were high theater, with casting, costumes, props, stage directions, rehearsals, and audiences. In *Theatres of Human Sacrifice*, Mark Pizzato says that the Aztecs "sacrificed warriors taken in battle, after costuming and rehearsing them as god-actors" (31). This included a preference for good-looking victims who, if overweight, would be put on a diet. The value of high-quality sacrificial victims was such that the Aztec would declare "flower wars" where they would take care not to harm their valuable prisoner-gods (Pizzato 32).

Before the sacrifice, victims were often treated well and showered with popular devotion as the gods they were chosen to represent. Honor was not directed to the victim per se but to the god he represented and to the warrior who provided him for execution. The relationship between the prisoner and the warrior who captured him could be quite intimate. The warrior identified himself with the man/god whom he defeated/worshipped/became. After the sacrifice, he would wear the victim's skin, simultaneously personifying the victim and the god (Pizzato 27, 34).

Like Meso-Americans, Romans also practiced human sacrifice and framed it in terms of war and sports. All forms of human sacrifice in Rome were formally declared illegal in 97 BCE (Kirsch 54) except the gladiatorial games, which were originally sacred rituals of mortal combat to honor newly dead nobility or to thank the gods for a victory with offerings of slain warriors. The popularity of the games turned them into grand theatrical productions that needed huge venues, such as the Colosseum. Somewhat like the god-captives of the Aztecs, successful gladiators were the subject of popular adoration and could achieve superstar status (Köhne and Ewigleben 7). The gladiatorial *ludi*[6] were also a means for social advancement for those who sponsored them, as well as strong political statements testifying to the might of the ever-expanding empire. The biggest difference between Meso-America and Rome was that gladiator heroes were rewarded with their lives and occasionally their freedom.

Futrell describes the politics of gladiatorial combat:

> The munera, the gladiatorial combats, are the most infamous of Rome's blood sports. The term literally means "duties" or "obligations," originally defined in terms of the duty owed to the deceased by his survivors but eventually identified with the duty owed the people of Rome

6. State religious celebrations, which included sports, jugglers, animal acts, and theater (Kuritz 43)

> by its leaders…. The [gladiatorial] amphitheater must be viewed in association with Roman Imperialism as a conscious means of persuasion of the legitimacy, supremacy, and potential for violence of the Roman State. (10)

For both the Aztecs and the Romans, war, sports, and human sacrifice were usually men-on-men action. When women were involved, they were rarely anything other than victims or spectators.

The importance of blood in the sacred performance of human sacrifice calls to mind the blood sacrifices of animals in other religions, including Candomblé. There is one profoundly important difference between blood offerings involved with human sacrifice and those involving the ritual slaughter of animals in classical African religion: blood sacrifice in Candomblé is not performed as a means for producing victims who suffer for the sanctity of the ritual. It is undertaken so that the axé present in the living blood of animals may be transferred to objects, spirits, and congregants for whom the ritual is enacted, and so that the meat of the animal could be prepared as food for gods and mortals. Like casualties in war (and the culinary demands of the kitchen for meat dishes), the suffering of animals is an unfortunate byproduct, not a desired element of the spiritual performance or the menu.

On the other hand, religious terrorists share Meso-American and Roman values in which human sacrifice is ethically permissible and even necessary. In *Terror in the Mind of God*, Mark Juergensmeyer states that acts of religious terrorism are performances of sacred drama designed to make symbolic political statements and transform the world:

> The very adjectives used to describe acts of religious terrorism—symbolic, dramatic, theatrical—suggest that we look at them not as tactics but performance violence … they are dramas designed to have an effect on the several audiences that they affect. (124)

This audience is now global:

> Increasingly, terrorism has been performed for a television audience around the world. In that sense it has been as real a global event as the transnational events of the global economy. Ironically, terrorism has become a more potent global political force than the organized political efforts to control and contain it…. This global dimension of terrorism's organization and audience, and the transnational responses to it, gives special significance to the understanding of terrorism as a public performance of violence—as a social event with both real and symbolic aspects…. These rites of violence have brought an alternative view of public reality—not just a single society in transition, but a

> world challenged by strident religious visions of transforming change. (Juergensmeyer 144)

Like the Aztecs and Romans, religious terrorists aim to establish the supremacy of their own imagined theocracy by demonstrating how powerless their enemies are in the face of divinely mandated violence. Terrorists usually see themselves as fighting a holy war that is cosmic in scope, and they frame acts of terrorism as selfless sacrifice that must include the dramatic execution of unwilling victims. Terrorists often include themselves as willing victims who die in the terrorist performance, thus perpetuating a mythos of sympathetic identification with victims akin to the Aztec captives-as-gods, the Roman gladiators-as-heroes, and religious martyrdom.[7]

In each of these performances of violence, the act of killing is transformed (that is, *ritualized*, sometimes after the fact) into a sacred performance of duty that, I believe, leads to ecstatic pleasures for the audience sponsoring the performance and the men who kill. Once the people in charge acquire a taste for these pleasures, they mandate the performance of terrorism-as-sacrifice with regularity. We need only look at the popularity of bombing civilian targets and secret torture in our own contemporary cultures, two forms of terrorism now found across the globe.

Similarities between the performance of terrorism and the conduct of soldiers at war make the boundary between the two permeable and subjective: one person's terrorist can be another's war hero. Terrorists, in fact, tend to identify themselves as soldiers fighting a war. The difference (which is not always easy to determine) lies in what is defined as an appropriate target of violence and the perceived difference between "casualty" and "victim."

Nations label human sacrifice as inappropriate and evil, even as they justify doing it themselves. They usually frame the bombing of civilians and torture as outlaw behaviors outside of expected ethical norms. Institutions that sponsor such activities take great pains to hide the terrorist activities they covertly promote. When caught engaging in terrorist activities, governments will either denounce their own operatives as rogue players or frame such outlaws as heroes and their terrorist performances as appropriate acts of defense within the rule of law, or at least within the extralegal rules of war.

Keep in mind that, in many fundamentalist religious communities, the fanatical terrorists that emerge from their midst are seen as

7. Not all terrorists are religious terrorists. But the notions of theocracy and holy war are readily exchangeable with other non-theistic ideologies based on intimate cosmologies grounded in racism, ethnic cleansing, the march of history in communism, and even democratic principles when used to excuse and condone the production of victims and the perpetuation of vendetta.

illegal outlaws who step outside of the realm of proper conduct and are no longer representative of the religious community. From the viewpoint of the terrorists, however, their transgressive behavior sanctifies them even further because they follow a higher authority and are thus absolved of guilt. They step out of line to do the hard things that most societies do not condone. As such, they are divinely extralegal soldiers and above the rule of earthly law, Heaven's own rebels whose actions come from pushing the fundamentalist beliefs of their source communities (including fanatical secular patriotism, communism, democracy, and racism) to their logical extremes.

Terrorist acts fulfill the criteria previously mentioned for ritual. They are often full of heavy symbolic value attached to the target and the date of the attack. Terrorist performance can be highly theatrical, involving costumes and props (especially important in the production of pre-sacrifice videos in which the warrior-martyr gives a last will and testament), and the designation of a location for the "staging" of the act that signifies a dramatic encounter set within a much bigger cosmic-mythical narrative. The terrible face-to-face immediacy of a bombing, execution, or torture session is a horrific, nonfictional drama that is cloaked, buffered, and sanctified by a strong sense of divine justice.

Juergensmeyer gives an example of such a sanctified dramatic frame in a warrior-martyr video starring a young Palestinian man:

> The mission he and his friend would carry out involved plastic explosives, either strapped around his waist or carried in a knapsack, but he was portrayed holding a gun—most likely included in the video to give him a martial demeanor.[8] "Tomorrow is the day of encounter," the smiling boy said … he and his colleagues would "make our blood cheap for the sake of God, out of love for this homeland and for the sake of freedom and honor of this people … that Palestine might be liberated." (70)

A distinctive element of the terrorist ritual is the role of the victims. The terrorist act is known in advance only by the perpetrators, which guarantees the element of surprise so that the victims cannot avoid stepping out of the ordinary world and evade being incorporated into the bloody ecstasy of the performance. These acts are usually not designed simply to kill people as if they were passive spectators. The performance of terrorism includes the hapless victim as a performer, albeit an unwilling one, whose suffering is a reflection of the evils inflicted upon the righteous that inspired the terrorist act in the first place. We can see the importance that terrorists place on the victim-as-

8. The addition of the gun-as-theatrical-prop gives the young man a masculine as well as martial demeanor.

performer by the frequency in which these performances include torture and mutilation. The victim is expected to perform agony. As such, the terrorist cherishes and desires the victim as *the* essential element in an all-too-human sacrifice.

Terrorists' willingness to sacrifice their own lives often justifies horrible carnage. By incorporating their own deaths (either potentially or actually) into the ritual performance of violence, terrorists become sacrificial victims as well as executioners of justice. Juergensmeyer describes the mentality of the terrorist-as-victim:

> Billy Wright, who had been convicted for his role in the terrorist acts conducted by the Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force paramilitary group, said that "there's no doubt" that within "every terrorist" there is the conviction that "he is the victim." According to Wright, this allows the terrorist to justify his action "morally within his own mind." (167)

Since the role of the hero-victim in spiritual discourse is quite significant, it is no surprise to find mythical language and the rites of military honors, religious revivals, passion plays, and millenialist fervor for end-of-the-world cataclysm in describing the ecstatic experience of destruction. Terrorists live and breathe the violent myths of their respective communities. The story of the hero-victim is no longer a metaphor. The will to die represents an immediate and available identity/experience for those who choose the path to martyrdom and seek to expand its blessings to hapless passersby. It gives the warrior-martyr immediate access to heroic, cosmic self-identity and group-identity, and allows them to experience their own form of transcendent solidarity.

The role of pleasure is critically important in the performance of terrorism. Part of the pleasure comes from bonding with those who have made the same commitment to the cause. Like the military, there is the production of punitive solidarity that comes when one dedicates oneself to God's team (or its ideological equivalent for non-theists) against the forces of evil, especially when the warrior-martyr is indoctrinated in a clandestine paramilitary training camp with fellow warrior-martyrs.[9] Other sources of pleasure in common with the military would include acting out one's dominance of one's foes, the warmth associated with defending the good, and freedom from normal ethical restrictions. It is a sanctified form of team vanity that demands payback in blood for insult. Unlike the military, warrior-martyrs may take pleasure in bonding with their victims as a fellow victim, a claim of innocence when

9. Carol Burke pointed out to me that not all terrorists go to training camps (personal communication, February 2008). Nevertheless, the pervasive notion that they are soldiers in a war frames their identity within an imagined paramilitary ideal, discipline, and esprit de corps.

willing to die in the company of the innocent. The most important pleasure, however, is the same as that felt by Meso-American priests and Roman fans of the gladiatorial games: transgressive, excessive, bloody violence in which the failure of civil law is aesthetically framed as the dramatic performance of justice.

Dedication to egocentric holy vengeance as a license to perform violence inspires warrior-martyrs to enthusiastically engage in bloodbaths. But it is also eroticized vengeance. Overtly, this violence-fueled eroticism is framed as heterosexual. Speaking of martyrs in the Muslim Hamas movement, Juergensmeyer says, "They expect that the blasts that kill them will propel them to a bed in heaven where the most delicious acts of [hetero]sexual consummation will be theirs for the taking" (198). Folk rituals associated with suicide bombers in Palestine celebrate the deaths of their heroes as wedding parties (Juergensmeyer 166).

The erotic appeal for terrorists may not always be heterosexual, even if it is wrapped up in antihomosexual rhetoric. Juergensmeyer says that for terrorists (which he points out are overwhelmingly male) who bond together in brotherhoods, "such close male bonding could have a homoerotic element" (202). For some terrorists, no doubt it does. Conscious realization of homoerotic feelings for one's fellow terrorists, however, can cause tremendous cognitive dissonance. Homosexual urges must be sublimated into male bonding, accompanied by strong condemnation of homosexuals, especially by men within the organization who might themselves be troubled by feelings of same-sex desire. Those who feel burdened by homoerotic cravings can resort to martyrdom/infliction of pain as means of private penance and public proof that they are Straight and manly, thus restoring and sanctifying their shattered egos. All the while, they are free to surreptitiously enjoy sublimated homoerotic (and, more than likely, sadomasochistic) pleasure in the punitive performance of violent cosmic retribution alongside other like-minded men. When shameful homoerotic desire is allowed no other outlet, or when it is satisfied in secret desperation, it may covertly fuel acts of violence involving gratuitous bloodshed, mutilation, and same-sex rape in a sacred quest for redemption, self-worth, and a sense of belonging. [10]

The higher occurrence of terrorist activities among war-based and virulently homophobic communities also leads avowed enemies to become strange political bedfellows as they justify the oppression of Gay people. One result of Gay liberation in Israel (and in the United

10. One could therefore argue that any society that is serious about stopping terrorism should actively promote Gay culture and LGBTQ rights. This would defuse at least some would-be terrorists who seek to purify themselves from unclean homoerotic urges.

Nations) has been a rather awkward and sporadic solidarity "movement" of some fundamentalist Jews, Christians, and Muslims against it. This is especially true in Jerusalem, which has seen protests from representatives of all three groups in the last few years when the LGBTQ community plans its Pride parade. Anti-Muslim Jewish homophobes and anti-Jewish Muslim homophobes applaud each other's calls for righteous terrorist violence against Gay people, even as they plot each other's destruction.

Part of this supposed unity between Muslim and Jewish segments of Israeli/Palestinian society is the need to continue the violence between them, unencumbered by LGBTQ awareness that undermines the sacred masculinity of the warrior-martyr and the deep, resounding pleasures associated with theatrical public violence. In order to continue performances in which they joyfully bomb, execute, and torture each other, it is important for Muslim, Christian, and Jewish holy war enthusiasts to "smear the queer."

Communitas

In order to understand how men bind themselves together into outlaw groups such as terrorists, soldiers, and Circuiteers, it is important to understand how such groups tap into communitas.

Anthropologist Victor Turner coined the term *communitas* in reference to the moment of communal ecstasy that is marked by subversion of the social barriers that separate participants. Defined as "humankindness," Turner describes it as "an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society" (97). Communitas is most apparent during ritual moments of "liminality" when people are without status, neither one thing nor another. Turner sees communitas as a universal phenomenon, "a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared" (138).

Initiations designed to transform a human being into a different person specifically utilize *normative communitas*, bonding for the purpose of explicit social engineering. Initiations routinely force the production of communitas through oppression. Initiates are reduced to a status-less state through suffering, fear, awe, and the elimination of all possible distinctions. In this state of communal degradation, initiates can bond with each other. *Ideological communitas* is that same force of humankindness with, as Turner puts it, "explicitly formulated views on how men [*sic*] may best live together in comradely harmony" (134). On the other hand, *spontaneous communitas* is "a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition" that occurs on its own with the free consent

of those who enjoy it (Turner 140). Instead of promoting a specific goal, it opens up possibilities. Turner calls it "ecstasy" that is "richly charged with affect, mainly pleasurable ones" (139).

Spontaneous communitas is the inspiration for normative communitas rituals and ideological communitas; normative and ideological communitas are means by which the bonding power of spontaneous communitas can be generated and manipulated. Thus, it is important for such rituals and ideologies to at least pay lip service to the voluntary assent of initiates and universal principles of human solidarity.

Turner claims that communitas is significantly different from Durkheimian solidarity, which maintains the distinction between the in-group and outsiders (132). Turner's definition of communitas is overly naive, however. There are many ways in which humans can define themselves so that, ideologically, they bond with all of humanity and the cosmos, yet still single out those they despise. Ideological communitas saturates the U.S. Declaration of Independence. This did not prevent those who signed it from creating a nation in which slavery was legal, and denying women the right to participate in their own governance. All that is necessary is a definition that excludes certain groups from being considered human, mature, sane, or good.[11]

The Military: Designing Acceptable Outlaws

In his biography of Civil War general James S. Wadsworth, Wayne Mahood describes the profound pleasures associated with male bonding in the military:

> The creation of a disciplined army, with which the men can identify in both body and spirit, demands a closeness and trust generally unknown—and likely unattainable—at other times. A modern military historian has observed that: "At its height, this sense of comradeship [common in war] is ecstasy…. Men are true comrades only when each is ready to give up his life for the other, without reflection and without thought of personal loss." (215–16).[12]

Examination of the pleasures of military camaraderie and the ecstasy of terrorism reveals that normative communitas is at work in

11. In defense of the Declaration of Independence, it should also be noted that, although there were groups of humans left out, it nevertheless held the promise of universal equality, which, over time, is coming to fruition. Today, the ideological communitas implicit in the Declaration and the Constitution are slowly but surely leading the country to full rights for Gay people.
12. The willingness to die in terrorist, military, and religious/patriotic discourse is absent in Circuit discourse, although it can be found somewhat in the Gay male community's AIDS discourse in which those who seroconvert are portrayed as victim-martyrs.

boot camp and terrorist training camp rituals that bond soldiers and warrior-martyrs together with their respective groups, while ideological communitas can be found in the theories, legends, and cosmologies that justify their existence. In rituals and initiations that foster normative communitas, the magic of humankindness is often tightly bound and restricted to a specific disciplined group. The result of this bonding/binding is a strong interpersonal ego-identity that can easily be aimed as a weapon against others who are not within the sacred sphere of carefully tailored human identity, which is universal in theory but elite in application.

I experienced normative communitas in its martial form when I went through Marine Corps boot camp in 1983. The transformative nature of Marine Corps training is expressed in the folk saying, "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Unlike other branches of the military, a Marine never really leaves the Corps. The cosmic significance of Marine Corps initiation is apparent in the drill instructors' mission to indoctrinate the recruits for "God, country, and Corps," in that order. The universal is first encapsulated in reference to the nondenominational "God." Only then is the focus narrowed to "country," and further narrowed to "Corps."[13]

In keeping with that tradition of transformation and indoctrination, I never refer to myself as a Marine in past tense, even though I am no longer active in the service. I suspect that many militant *jihadis*, Christian crusaders, and communist comrades-in-arms have similar sentiments.

Terrorism follows war with distressing regularity. In civil society, disputes are resolved in the courts precisely so that people who feel they have been wronged do not take the law into their own hands. Since the formation of the *Code of Hammurabi*, the primary purpose of law has been the prevention of vendetta.

War, however, is the failure of civil law. The excessive and transgressive carnage involved in warfare is dressed up as the enforcement of civil law, despite the fact that civil law is the very thing that war negates.[14] Like the human sacrifice of the Meso-Americans, war and the destruction it causes must be justified by fear of greater destruction

13. A similar, but nonmilitary (and much less violence-oriented), transformation of self came with my initiation as an *ogã* in Candomblé when I was bonded with the community and those universal forces personified as the *Orixás*.

14. Carnage on the battlefield is not the only way that war damages society. As Betty Reardon says categorically in *Sexism and the War System*, "War is by its very nature wasteful" and is controlled by the male elite, who divert resources to it, but not by the women who are so often its economic victims when budgets for social welfare programs and education are cut (27–28). War proponents, who frame war as necessary for a healthy and productive society, often overlook this point.

if soldiers are not allowed to kill and be killed for the greater good. Framing war as socially and/or divinely sanctified ritual of sacrifice gives it moral justification.

But, like the gladiatorial games, war is not just solemn ritual. It is entertainment and spectacle, a magnificent source of pleasure in which soldiers are an indispensable yet disposable commodity. The frame in which war is set includes the language of theater and sexual performance, thus distancing the noncombatant audience from the daily horrors experienced by the troops on the ground. Political hawks and high-ranking officers in command speak of war as high drama akin to team sports and voyeuristic sex; it is in the *theater* of war that military leaders *stage* battles to *penetrate* the position of the enemy and *score* a victory if our troops do not *drop the ball*. Soldiers are treated like stars if they come back whole and venerated as warrior-martyrs sacrificed on the Altar of Freedom[15] when they come back in body bags. War is sexy; women, it is said, love men in uniform. [16]

But the reality of war is not accurately represented when described in terms of sports, sex, and dramatic performance. Soldiers are trained to do the most uncivil acts, such as blowing up buildings and shooting people on sight, without the threat of punishment if done in the theater of war. Soldiers are undisciplinable by civil law when engaged in battlefield performance and are held accountable to a separate system, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), that makes them answerable only to military authorities. In order to prepare soldiers to perform clearly transgressive, excessive, and unethical acts, basic training binds them together with techniques designed to invoke normative communitas within the group, which is then further bound by the appropriately named "chain of command."

Burke describes the multiple goals of military training for men:

> Training not only strives to discipline the body and the mind to automatic response; it also aims to reintegrate the trainee's personality into a rigid system of superiors and subordinates and, in turn, to win him membership in something larger than himself. (44)

When soldiers win their membership into something larger than themselves, that grand *something* is supposed to be as big as the United

15. The popularity of the sacrifice metaphor in terrorism and conventional warfare demonstrates just how thin the epistemological line is between those two forms of masculine performance.

16. There is a problem, however, when they come back wounded. Although we try to give them respect, they represent the symbolic failure of defeat-as-moral-inferiority that is intrinsically part of war. We find it difficult to romanticize the wounded, sanctify them, or portray them as sexy, so we usually end up at some point simply ignoring them, just as we ignore injured athletes that can no longer play.

States, including civilians. Society sanctifies military personnel as protectors of the nation, extralegal enforcers who are allowed to act outside of the rule of civil law in order to protect society from those who would destroy it. The outlaw status of soldiers is downplayed, even when soldiers sing about it in officially forbidden jody calls. Nevertheless, those trained to kill on a grand scale are potentially dangerous when they come back home. As members of society who value the destructive potential of our military in defending ourselves from our enemies, we pretend for the military's sake and our own that our veterans are all heroes, not outlaws, and not at all a threat to civil order. [17]

The training of soldiers invokes normative communitas because each soldier must be disciplined, humbled, and ready to submit to authority without question before each is granted license to destroy. Warriors can be proud of their skills, but they must be kept on a very short leash. The training cannot be superficial; it must run deep and remain well entrenched in their individual and collective psyches. Once they choose to be soldiers, much of their training conditions them to give up their freedom of choice (as in the old Marine Corps joke, "If I want your opinion, I'll give it to you") to the point that they no longer privilege their own self-preservation. This conditioning is amazingly effective. To this day, I would willingly give up my life for my beloved Marine Corps if my brothers and sisters were in jeopardy.

Perhaps the strength of this bond (fear of it, actually) motivates societies to oppress those trained in combat. Soldiers are treated much like criminals serving out a sentence for the duration of their time in the military.[18] This oppression is expressed in Marine Corps folk speech by the image of "the big green[19] weenie (penis) up your asshole" representing the Corps as an uncaring, mindless bureaucracy-schlong that sodomizes helpless Marines and can, absurdly, "take a dump (defecate) on you." Soldiers' civil rights are seriously curtailed, as are their movements, their clothing options, and their voices. Enlisted personnel make up an incarcerated yet mobile lower-class workforce, and officers are their semi-incarcerated upper-class wardens who are forbidden by law to interact too closely with them.[20] The means for conditioning soldiers to accept the institutional oppression forced upon them in

17. For the most part, the pretense works. Most veterans never seriously consider applying their military skills against their own people.
18. It is common to say that one *serves time* in the military, just as one serves time in jail.
19. Green is often used to represent Marines as a siblinghood that transcends race. There are no Blacks or Whites in the Corps, only dark green and light green.
20. When a man is made an officer, he becomes "an officer and a gentleman" (a woman becomes "an officer and a gentlewoman") marking officers as elite and the enlisted ranks as common, neither gentlemen nor gentlewomen.

military life is to invoke a form of heroic punitive solidarity with strong secular-spiritual and often thinly-veiled religious overtones.

Rituals for normative communitas are intrinsically punitive. Initiators crush initiates into a state of status-less degradation by forcing them to endure shared suffering. The permanent transformation that normative communitas is supposed to imprint upon the initiate has an explicit ideological purpose that can readily be exploited in terms of an "Us Against Them" protective-punitive ideology. In the best of soldiers, however, their outlaw status is tempered by universal humanitarian ethics that theoretically supersede the thirst for vendetta fostered by the battlefield experience. Officially, the military expects soldiers to disobey unethical orders from superiors. In practice, however, those ethics are often superseded by submission to authority and loyalty to the pack at all costs to insure survival of the group. It is in the wide and murky gap between official humanitarian ethics, troop survival (the strong moral imperative to give up everything, including one's life, for one's fellow soldiers), and prior conditioning to obey orders without question that soldiers find themselves tempted to behave like terrorists.

The Spiritual Ecstasy of the Circuit

In contrast to terrorists and soldiers (but not necessarily in opposition to them[21]), we have Circuiteers.

Like terrorists and soldiers, Circuit participants are outlaws who transgress the normal bounds of propriety of their larger community. But the Circuit uses a ritual frame in which all of the participants join together into one multifaceted team that has no need of enemies or victims. When Circuiteers step out to dance, there is no special performance expected of them other than the individual's own fierce self-expression, and there is no permanently transformative goal that all participants must achieve.

What can be permanent is the memory of witnessing one's own personal transformation and immersion into communal ecstasy. Participants often narrate moments when the sexiness, the music, the dancing, and the sheer joy of showing off for each other will catapult the crowd into a state of hyper-awareness.[22] In a time out of

21. It is impossible for me to completely separate terrorism from more ethical forms of sadomasochism practiced in the Gay male community. Since the Circuit includes Leather events and tolerates S&M practices that are an important part of Leather culture, I will not portray the terrorist and the Circuiteer as polar opposites.

22. In an interview with DJ Barry Harris, he stated that the Circuit was not spiritual. I asked him if he had ever felt a total bonding with the crowd. His eyes lit up and he spoke of it as an experience without equal, as if he was, for that moment, telepathically linked to the crowd. When I asked him if he would consider that experience

[Moody Mustafa, www.moodypics.com

Halloween's in New Orleans crew in 2001. The theme for costumes that year was patriotic in response to the terrorist attacks on the US on 9/11, only a month and a half before the party took place.

time, people dance like there is no tomorrow. A party with no such moments is a failure.

Circuit communitas is not like the normative communitas I experienced when being initiated as a Marine on Parris Island or a Candomblé *ogã*. Normative communitas is the result of manipulative directives for *reducing* participants as a means of eliminating status, while the spontaneous communitas of the Circuit *elevates* participants into a state of status-free grandeur through shared joy.[229] The biggest difference is the role of coercion. Normative communitas is goal-oriented and marked by the regulation of routine by authority figures

spiritual, he agreed (interview, September 2000). Most DJs I have interviewed have had similar experiences.

whose will is not to be questioned. The regulatory properties of events that generate spontaneous communitas tend to be more fluid; they are carnivalesque in nature and are thus determined, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, by the very people who are undergoing the transformative process they themselves have set in motion: "It is the people as a whole, but organized in *their own way*" (255).

Differences are also physically visible in the individual and communal body-minds of soldiers and Circuiteers. A soldier in a platoon wears an identical uniform that is differentiated by subtle and not-so-subtle signs of merit and rank; individual status is inscribed on one's body through one's clothes, with clear markers that limit and regulate interaction within a rigid top-down command structure. The body of a Circuiteer, however, is pretty much naked from waist up with no insignias of rank or honor; potential for interaction is fluid, regulated somewhat by one's physical desirability and one's object(s) of desire. The fluidity of the collective body-mind in the Circuit likewise contrasts with the rigidity found in the military corps. When spectators look down at troops marching in formation, they see precise lines, exact movements, and universally stiff postures (especially when standing at attention) in a performance that submerges individual soldiers into the group. Soldiers become one highly disciplined body and one strictly regimented mind, a powerful and polished human weapon in all of its hardened finery. Not so the Circuit crowd; observers looking down at the sea of men will see bottom-up communal consensus-in-motion that is constantly reinforced, undermined, and re-negotiated by individuals physically merging with and smoothly disengaging from the collective flow.[23]

Social fluidity promotes the generation of a communal self that arises by its own power and makes its own rules. Spontaneous communitas in the Circuit must be, using Turner's word, "invoked," not forced (138). All are invited to *rise* to the heights of transcendent solidarity together. The more participants who are raised up, the greater the joy is for all concerned. Communitas is a priceless gift that the dancers give to each other without coercion. To achieve it, the Circuit must remain a frame that fosters spontaneity and encourages the creative expression of the participants. It *cannot* be a boot camp.

But all is not sweetness and light. Like homoeroticism, masculine egocentrism is a common thread in terrorist, military, and Circuit epistemologies. The ego of the Circuit-as-group tends to display various degrees of body fascism as people critically check out whoever

23. I wish I could say that I came up with the observations expressed in this paragraph on my own. They originate from a conversation with Carol Burke on a rough draft of this chapter that I showed her in early 2008.

approaches them. Once in the milieu, it is extremely difficult for most participants to keep from buying into body fascism, especially in cold, analytical regard concerning their own bodies. Most of them will hit the gym months in advance before the party, groom their hair a short time before the event, and wear just the right outfits for peacock-esque display on the dance floor. Egocentric display is likewise vitally important in a soldier's presentation of self (such as a uniform that is flawlessly perfect, what Marines call "locked and cocked"). If videos of carefully staged speeches given by warrior-martyrs before they die and those of meticulously-groomed Osama bin Laden (produced with appropriate props and costumes) are any indication, the same concern for image is true for terrorists as well.

A big difference between the Circuiteer and the soldier/terrorist is the source of authority. Demand for personal excellence in the Circuit means participants are free to elevate or degrade each other at will. No top-down command structure is there to regulate behavior. We can assume, however, that most everyone at a Circuit party wants to have a good time. It is in their best interests to help each other in pursuit of happiness and bond together on the dance floor. This is not easy, however, when so much scrutiny is placed on the participant's appearance, performance, and attitude. Personal ego is on the line.

The difference between the ego of a soldier/terrorist and a Circuiteer is that performed identity in the Circuit is much more frivolous; it is tied to physical appearances (and, to a less immediate degree, witty repartee) rather than defense of the nation and/or cosmic war. All of that masculine vanity that tempts beautiful Circuit men to act with insufferable arrogance is trivial when compared to the grand egocentrism attached to religious fundamentalism, secular ideological purity, and the soldier-as-hero. In the case of religious fundamentalism, holy vanity all too often allows one to damn perceived enemies to eternal hell. Eternally damning others is only a short cognitive distance from license to kill and maim them. The performance of icy disdain by the Gay male body fascist is every bit as obnoxiously vain as the worst fanatic shouting death to his enemies at the top of his lungs in front of a TV camera, but much less harmful to society. In terms of concrete manifestations of physical force, the arrogant power of muscle in the Circuit replaces the destructive power of the gun, the bomb, and the helpless victim at one's feet in military extralegal and terrorist illegal outlaw dynamics.

Bonding in the Circuit reaches its grandest expression when the DJ and dancers enter into a state of fierce solidarity, when all distinctions crumble in the face of shared joy. But first, the participants must feel confident enough (in other words, *fierce* enough) to allow social barriers

to fall. The root cause of body fascism and drug use is fear of rejection. Fondness for intoxicants and preoccupation with one's physical fitness are means by which participants attempt to fit themselves into the performance frame of the Circuit.

Obsession with physical appearance and drugs are not ends in themselves. Looking like a Greek god and getting intoxicated do not guarantee a good time. If they did, Circuit boys would do nothing but get high by themselves and dance in front of a mirror, which is basically the behavior of *clones* (physically attractive Gay men who strive to have just the right look and who end up looking like each other) when they seek reflections of themselves on the dance floor. Nevertheless, clones still join a crowd consisting of all kinds of body types, precisely so that they can bask in public adulation. The body beautiful is one accessory among several for attraction. In turn, a Circuiteer uses intoxicants as social lubricants to reduce the friction that one feels when exposed to the scrutiny of so many other people. When used properly, drugs allow participants to express their attraction to the objects of their desire, or at the very least, be tolerant of the less attractive.

A high level of performance anxiety is necessary for the production of fierce solidarity. Performance anxiety is the common predicament faced by the vast majority of Circuit participants, a form of shared oppression that differs from the oppression imposed upon initiates in normative communitas in that most Circuit participants are unaware that almost everyone else, even the most beautiful, shares this anxiety. In the vulnerability that participants feel when they step into the venue and onto the dance floor, there is an almost palpable need for the group to overcome isolation in favor of solidarity. The ability to overcome painful, ego-crushing performance anxiety is also different from the suffering of initiates in normative communitas who have no other option but to suffer. At any point, Circuiteers may step away from the party. It is their threefold desire to share, judge, and be admired that keeps them there.

As mentioned earlier, positive attention is the coin of the realm. When participants agree to let down their barriers and spend their attention on each other, everyone profits. This is why hilarity is so vital to fierce solidarity. It creates instant intimacy through appreciation of the absurd, in others and in themselves. To laugh heartily in public is to step outside of oneself in temporary ecstasy, to lose control of oneself physically and mentally for the duration of the laugh. Since laughing is extremely pleasurable, it is also attractive because others want to share in the humor. Targets of humorous remarks gain major prestige when they can laugh at themselves, thus performing the antithesis of arrogance in the quest for ego gratification.

Jesse Kreitzman and Edge Publications, www.edge.boston.com

Work, girls: muscle camp, humorous accessorizing and performance of femininity by muscular men, at White Party-Palm Springs 2008.

Muscle Camp, Boot Camp, and Real Men

Humor is a vital performance genre intrinsic to both the military and the Circuit communities' internal regulatory mechanisms and production of solidarity. In the military, humor allows soldiers to cope with their shared institutional oppression. In the Circuit, however, humor prevents restrictive codification of the ritual performance and is thus anti-institutional.

As mentioned earlier, muscle camp is a performance genre of Circuit humor in which well-built men adopt exaggerated effeminate behavior. It subverts the pervasive notion in violence-oriented masculinities that the masculine is in opposition to, or even in combat with, the feminine. Muscle camp, the performance of muscular nelliness, is related to the hardened femininity of the shaved headed semi-drag performance artists. But muscle camp is meant to be hilarious while the fierce androgyny of the performance artist is not.[24]

Humor in boot camp can likewise be anti-institutional, but only to a point. The sexualized humor of jody calls sung by drill instructors who transformed me into a "lean, mean fighting machine" Marine affirmed their masculine status as outlaws who did not kowtow to every whim of their commanding officers. It was a form of intimate sharing between the drill instructors and the recruits that softened the drill instructors' reputations as hard-hearted representatives of an unmerciful institution. Humor defused the underlying potential for homoeroticism and homophobia by confronting that potential through verbal expression within a comic frame. It also allowed our drill instructors to occasionally perform as entertainers rather than oppressors, thus winning our admiration as well as our fear. Nevertheless, such humor was rarely reciprocal. It was top-down and put us in our place because it was done to us as the targets of the humor but never to other drill instructors, officers (to their faces), or any other fully-initiated Marine.

In terms of effeminate behavior, the performance of masculinity in the military is not devoid of androgyny. In *Crossing the Line*, Simon Bronner describes cross-dressing as an important aspect of naval equator traditions. Its importance is similar to that of sexualized humor in boot camp in defusing homoeroticism and homophobia; the feminine is performed in order to exorcize it:

> To effect manliness at sea, especially given the view that maternally dominated, landed civilization is feminized and soft, and the military insecurity about homosexuality in an all-male environment, female

24. The goal of most performance artists is glamor, not humor. This also includes the performance of "tranny fierceness" by transwomen in the Circuit.

> figures or men in feminized positions, are sexually dominated and ridiculed … characters are externalized, ejected from the self; they are performed in Wog Queen contests, dog auctions, and homosexual enactments as ridiculous, passive, weak, and scared. (46)

Muscle camp, on the other hand, exorcizes the violent masculine identity that frames Straight men's relationships with other men in terms of fear and dominance. This is also the purpose of girl names and the tendency for Gay men to call each other "girl," "girlfriend," "darling," "hon," "fag," and "bitch" by invoking common membership in Gay male sisterhood.[25] The performance of nelliness is not meant to exorcize the feminine but to highlight it in ways that simultaneously debase those macho men who think of the feminine as inferior and elevate effeminate men as possessors of a performance genre that gains them favorable attention. It distinguishes Gay men from their Straight brothers, not by framing Gay men as effeminate, but as real men who are not afraid of the feminine.

Just as the barriers separating masculinity and femininity are undermined in the Circuit, so are attempts to regulate and codify its spirituality. Anyone who solemnizes Circuit ecstatic dance risks being ridiculed. There have been normative movements, such as Soul Dance, to channel Circuit spirituality as a means for communal psychic healing by reducing or eliminating drug use and having dancers follow a script (Lennox, Kammon, and Maris 38–40). So far, these movements have been unsuccessful. Arguably, such admirable efforts have not caught on because of the importance of masculinized excess and transgression in Circuit expressive culture. Getting intoxicated, having a body with more muscles than it needs, humorous exaggeration of stigmas, and scandalous behavior are all treasured features of Circuit male bonding. There is also the theatrical frame of the Circuit as a carnivalesque happening designed for spontaneous communitas. Regulation of social dynamics must necessarily be kept at a minimum. The only institution that counts is the one spontaneously created, enacted, and enforced by the collective Circuit body-mind.

It is because the Circuit community is so competitive and anxiety-ridden that it prizes the moments when the barriers fall, when ridicule transforms into all-inclusive hilarity and acceptance. Instead of a paralyzing fear of being seen as foolish, everyone is welcome to act a fool, to clown around, to laugh. These moments are perhaps the least sexually charged because participants interact in a state of sensual innocence.

25. Unlike Straight male discourse in which the feminizing of another man implies sexual as well as physical dominance of him, Gay male feminizing desexualizes other Gay men. When Circuiteers refer to each other as sisters, it means that they are equals who are not sexually attracted to each other.

It is during such moments that Gay men can forget that they are Gay and enjoy being men.

Tribe

A by-product of fierce solidarity in the Circuit is the peaceful regulation of the community by the community, significantly diminishing the need for brute force.

In popular imagination, a tribe is imagined as a self-regulating entity without the need for impersonal bureaucracies or institutions. The Circuit community is likewise self-regulating—random acts of kindness and etiquette are the rule, not the exception. If a participant gets out of line, biting humor or well-placed candor can quickly deflate an overinflated ego.

In terms of having a violent edge, the worst offenders tend to be ultramasculine, overmuscled, and "Straight-acting" body fascists. But even the biggest body fascists quickly realize that physically aggressive behavior will hurt them if they push it too far. The code of etiquette that regulates aggression by punishing excessively rude behavior with ridicule is amazingly effective. In the land of the Circuit, where positive attention is the coin of the realm, ridicule is to be avoided like bankruptcy. There is less need for aggressive bouncers in this world; sharp tongues regulate behavior much more effectively than dress codes, metal detectors, or billy clubs.

The Circuit community's preoccupation with beauty and status is a source of anxiety and humiliation for just about everyone, even those who consider themselves "A-list" (specimens of physical perfection). One cannot be at the pinnacle without the constant fear of falling off. Nobody, no matter how good-looking, masculine, well connected, or wealthy, is above devastating ridicule by the ugliest, skinniest (or fattest), queeniest participant. Everyone feels the pressures of competition, which is why many Gay men refuse to attend Circuit parties and why most Circuiteers go with friends for moral support. These pressures shape the way the Circuit community performs as a tribe. All it takes is a single well-placed eye-roll or sarcastic remark from the object of one's desire (or the object of one's disdain) to utterly wreck one's self-esteem.

I was attending the main event of the Winter Party in South Beach, which takes place outdoors on the beach. While taking a break from dancing, I saw five shirtless and lavishly muscled men—all tanned, all rugged, all in jeans or camouflage pants, all wearing boots (one had a chain attached to his wallet)—all of them living proof that, as Georg Simmel tells us, vanity is the need for others in order to despise them

(209). Not one of them was smiling, and all of them were looking around to see who was looking at *them*. They regarded their surroundings with open disdain bordering on malice and violence. A-list, indeed.

I could not resist. I went over to a friend of mine and pointed these men out to him without saying a word. Immediately we both began laughing at them. The absurdity of wearing jeans and boots (and a *wallet chain*!) on the beach in 85–degree Fahrenheit weather when everyone else was in beach gear was hilarious, even more so because this group had no desire in the least to be seen as funny or even fun. They *knew* they were sexy. They could kick my ass.

Fierce? I think not.

Commentary: Pilot

Philadelphia
January 2008

At the U.S. Air Force Academy, I was subjected to four years of incessant personal inspection of my dormitory, uniform, and grooming. As a group, we were inspected on our marching/parading and scored against competing squadrons. That scoring was an explicit motivation as privileges were granted to high-scoring units in addition to the personal satisfaction or sharing in the group's pride.

There was no doubt this training was normative in intent. Once we progressed beyond basic training, we grew increasingly aware of the absurdity of our system. Nonetheless, the motivations for team success and achievement forced us to continue playing the game.

Most days, hundreds of visiting tourists perched atop our marching area would look down at 4,000 cadets marching to lunch each day. We often referred to the whole scenario and the academy experience as "the zoo." I can remember feeling alternatively proud and disgusted/humiliated by the spectacle on any given day over those four years.

Although I personally didn't fully recognize my orientation while a cadet, I clearly remember the palpable sexual undertones of the humor and innuendo. With thousands of seventeen-to-twenty-two-year-old-young men, the sexual tensions were indeed thick. In fact, controlling and releasing that tension through the methods the author speaks about are important avenues to maintaining good order.

I was indeed attracted to the Circuit: judge, be judged, and share—with a clear desire to "knock out" as much sex as I could. I'd often go alone or with friends that at first I barely knew. I was desperate to find guys like me and to share experiences and ground myself in some shared "normalcy" via such acceptance. Although I didn't use drugs, I consumed alcohol to aid the "be judged" part as I pursued the almighty A-listers. My peers suggested that without harder drugs, my experience wouldn't be as strong. Perhaps not, but I did certainly experience several ecstatic moments on the dance floor shared by new friends and old. At moments like that, I soon contemplated why this could be so wrong and laughed while considering what my military buddies would think if they saw me in that environment.

I would acknowledge much of the author's eroticism and homoeroticism in my military experience, albeit usually manifested differently than his Parris Island stories. That tension dissipated as I began my active duty career, lived off base, and began juggling professional and

personal life under don't ask, don't tell. But the culture that developed during my early years of training persisted, especially when some assumed that political correctness wasn't required when females were absent.

I find comparisons of military soldiers to terrorists compelling, fascinating, and thought-provoking in many respects. However, it'd be irresponsible for me if I didn't make clear that there are very key differences between these groups. I spent countless hours in the classroom and in "real" situations learning the ethics of military conflict and the often-nuanced classification of combatant versus non-combatant, lawful target versus unlawful target, and the Geneva Conventions. Yes, I was trained to kill and to kill well (as well as rescue fallen soldiers and provide care/first aid for them), but painstaking effort was given to temper that ability with the knowledge and wisdom to discern right from wrong. Life-and-death situations on the battlefield are never black and white, and the humanitarian or combative choices our young soldiers make are extremely difficult. To the extent they make poor choices (in hindsight), it is a failure of our training—not our policy—which is to make correct and ethical choices with respect to the use of lethal force.

The expression "one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist" is useful mostly to remind us that we ought to consider the political, social, and economic causes for which our enemies fight and that we may share more interests than we care to remember. In fact, we can all hope that political, social, and economic choices will be afforded to those for whom self-sacrifice appears their only option. As such, terrorists' intent to kill indiscriminately is what distinguishes them, and such moral emptiness (however distorted by religion) will be their undoing in the long-term.

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